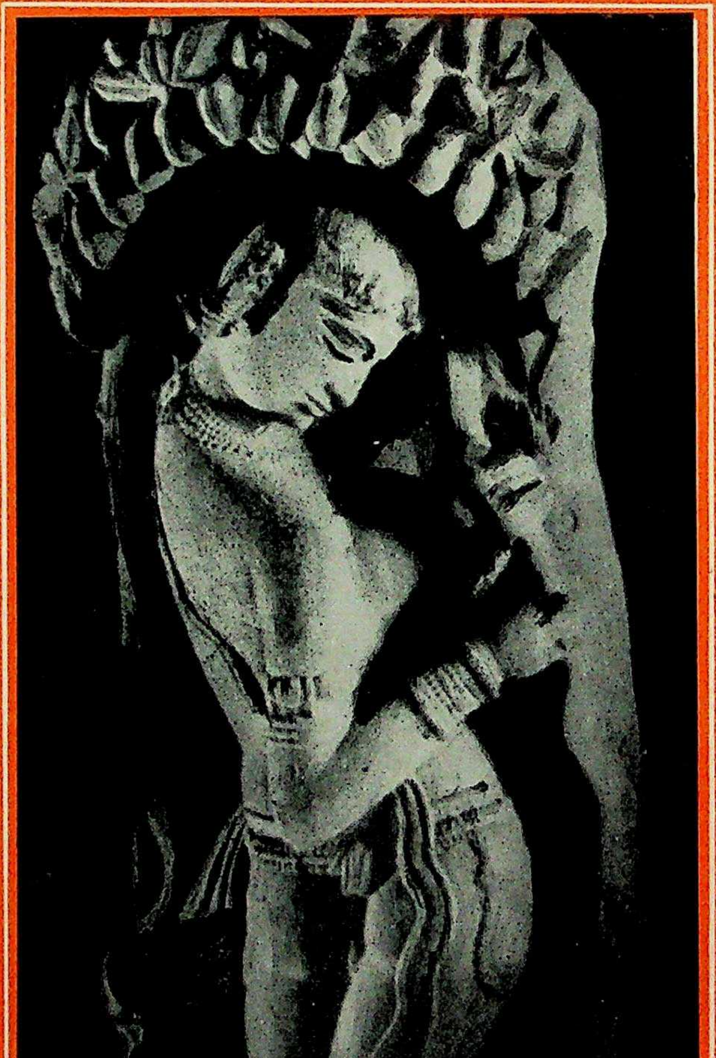
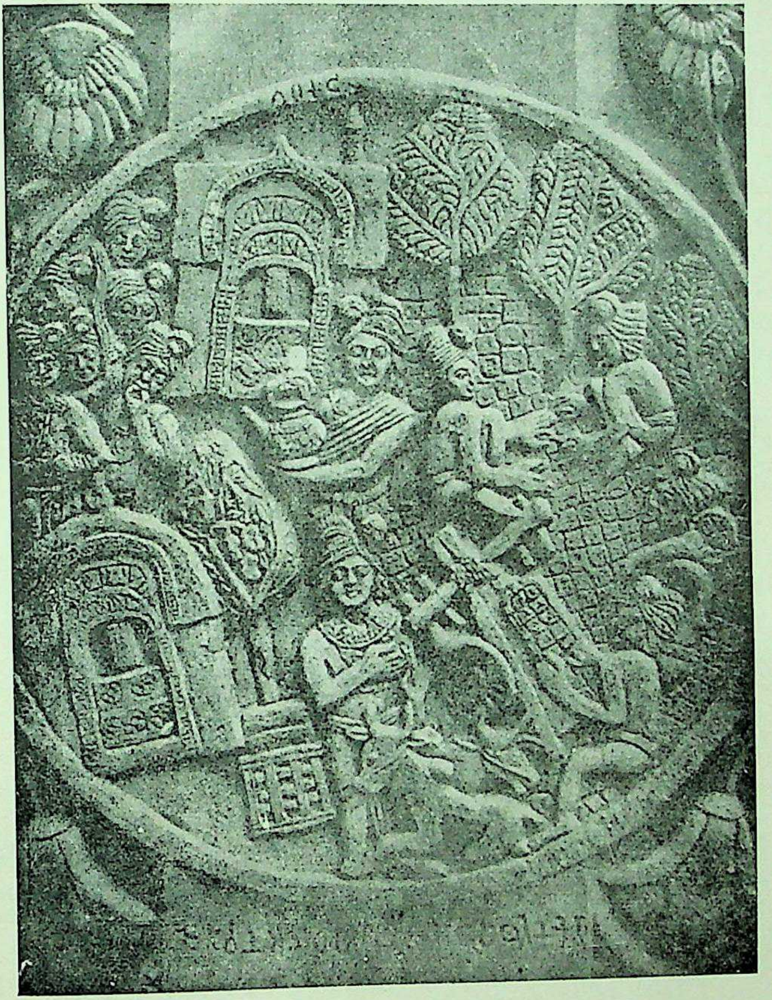
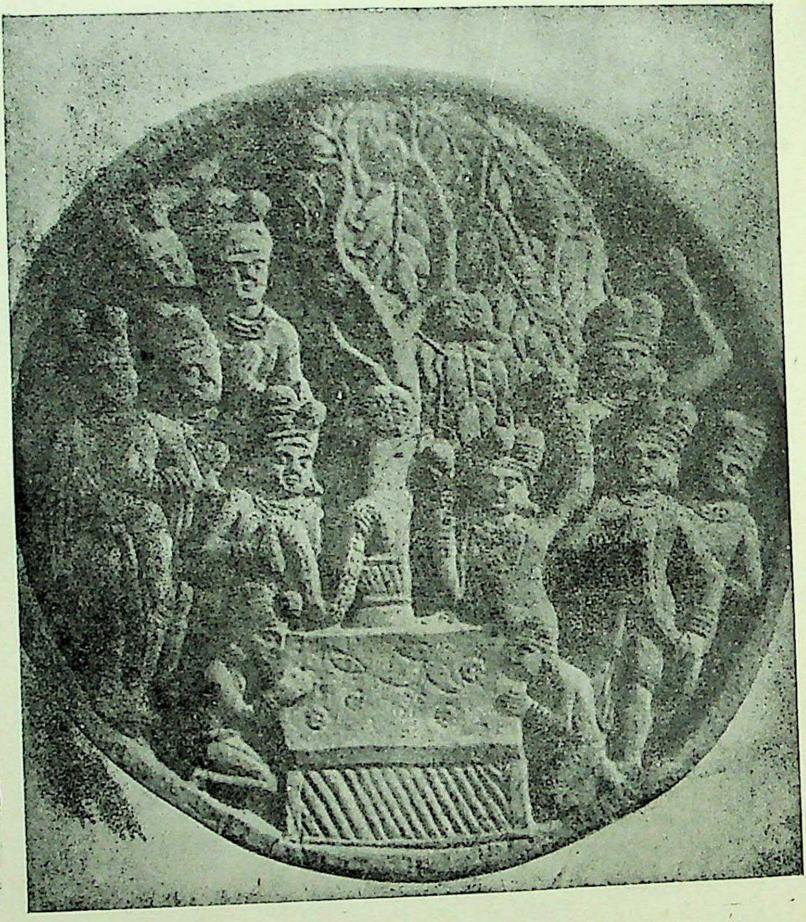
Tree Worship In Ancient India

B C Sinha







WORSHIP IN INDIA SERIES

SERIES No. 1

TREE WORSHIP IN ANCIENT INDIA

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TREE WORSHIP IN ANCIENT INDIA

Binod Chandra Sinha

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Dedicated
to
my wife
Smt. Vishnu Sinha

ऊर्ध्वमूलमधः शाखमश्वत्थं प्राहुरव्ययम् ।
छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि यस्तं वेद स वेदवित् ।। (गीता)

The wise speak
of the indestructible Pipal Tree
having its root above and branches below
whose leaves are the hymns; he who
knows it is a knower
of the Veda

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Preface

Men when they were in their natural form of religion rendered divine honour and worship to trees and plants. It is important to note that trees, flowers and shrubs have shared largely in this adoration. Most people will agree with this statement that—

> "There are few of the works of nature that combine so many and so varied charms and beauties as a forest ; that whether considered generally or particularly, whether as a grand geographical feature of a country or as a collection of individual trees, it is alike invested with beauty and with interest, and opens up to the mind a boundless field for inquiry into the mysterious laws of creation. But, a forest is not merely an aggregate of trees, it is not merely a great embodiment of vegetable life : it is the cheerful and pleasant abode of numerous varieties of animal life, who render it more animated and picturesque, and who find their shelter, food and happy homes."

There is no exaggeration in saying that trees line the road to prosperity. Magnificent rows of trees can still be seen alongside roads which speak of the wisdom of our ancestors and bear testimony to the prosperity of those times. Trees of the countryside not only provided a background of charm, but also acted as a source of much raw material needed by the village people. The general disappearance of trees of the countryside is a sure sign of decline in economic as well as their spiritual standards.

Well has it been said that man cannot live without trees. They provide him with timber, fuel, fruits, fodder and shade. They mitigate the severity of the climate, protect the soil and conserve the water. The very existence of man depends upon the proper husbanding of soil and water ; and trees are indispensable link in safeguarding these vital resources. In the words of Lord Buddha:

"The forest is a peculiar organism of unlimited kindness and

> benevolence that makes no demands for its sustenance and extends generously the products of its life activity; it affords production to all beings, offering shade even to the axeman who destroys it."

There is no need in saying that forests have always captured the imagination of our people and there are countless references to this great heritage in the ancient literature and the art of country.

Tree worship is one of the earliest forms of religion in Ancient India. It was through the worship of the trees that man attempted to approach and propitiate God. Before man developed agriculture, he lived mostly on fruits and nuts of trees. He used their implements for peace and war. It was from wood that he obtained fire to cook his food and to warm his cave dwellings. Apart from these, it is the beauty of their flowers which excited his imagination. In the words of Fergusson :

> "With all their poetry, and all their usefulness, we can hardly feel astonished that the primitive races of mankind should have considered trees as the choicest gift of the gods to men and should have believed that their spirits still delighted to dwell among their branches, or spoke oracles through the rustling of their leaves."

Trees are undoubtedly great friends of men.

It was this beneficial influence of the trees that prompted our remote ancestors to worship them. Without trees there shall be no life on this earth. It was in this context that *Vana Mahotsava* was launched in the year 1950. While celebrating the Ninth *Vana Mahotsava* in 1958, the Indian Prime Minister Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru observed, "There should be a strict rule that no one should cut down a tree without planting two in its place." There is a constant need to keep this principle in view.

This book has been primarily designed to meet the needs of the scholars of Ancient Indian History and Culture. But the interested layman will also be benefited.

My thanks are due to Dr. H.C. Sepaha and Mrs. Sadhana Sepaha who have inspired me to complete this work.

I must thank my brothers Dr. A.C. Sinha, Sri G.C. Sinha and Sri R.C. Sinha for their constant encouragement and help.

I am highly indebted to Dr. B.N. Sharma, Keeper and Head of the Archaeology Section in the National Museum, New Delhi, for his helpful discussion and supplying with a rare photograph of the tree-cult in the Kuśāṇa art of Mathurā.

At the end I express my gratitude to all the authors, whose works have been of help to me.

—Binod Chandra Sinha

1

Trees in Human Welfare

Introduction

Trees have played a vital role in the field of human welfare and they are doing it even now. They shall be playing this important role so long the human life exists on the face of this earth. India grows many trees and plants of industrial, economic, commercial and medicinal value. This vast wealth of flora can be put to better use than it is today. We very well know that the trees produce the best timber, give the finest fibres and make the most efficient firewood and charcoal. We are told which plants make good pulp paper, matches, fertilizers and pesticides. We learn from which plants we can get useful dyes, fats, oils, perfumes, waxes, cosmetics, gums, paints and varnishes, etc. No words can describe the full usefulness of the trees and plants. J.F. Dastur observes :

> "This vast sub-continent of ours with its wealth and variety of medicinal plants has accumulated through the ages a great mass of popular remedies, many of which are even today in common use throughout this country, though of course much of the folk-medicine is steadily being eroded by the advancing tide of synthetic drugs. Vegetable drugs have been known all over the world for centuries, some at least for thirty centuries. About two thousand plants are mentioned in the Āyurvedic, Unāni and Tibbi systems of medicine."

Some hundreds of plants which are yet imperfectly known to European Botanists, and with the virtues of which they are wholly unacquainted, grow wild on the plains and in the forests of India.[1]

The Amorkoṣa contains in one chapter the names of about three hundred medicinal vegetables. The Dravyābhidhāna, includes a far greater number ; the properties of which are distinctly related in medical tracts of approved authority. While giving a description of Mahwah tree, Charles Hamilton[2] observes :

"From this description it may easily be conceived that the

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[1] Asiatic Researches, *Vol. II*, p. 270.

> Mahwah tree, and its productions, are of singular and general use : especially in those dry and barren countries which, from the nature of their situation, are not so well calculated for producing in plenty and perfection the other necessaries of life."

Its flowers often being dried are eaten. When they are boiled with rice, they afford a wholesome nourishment. The oil yielded by its fruit resembles Ghee and the poor people often mix it with that commodity. The gum and the wood of the Mahwah tree are also very useful. This tree will grow in the most barren ground, where there is the least appearance of a soil. So it can be grown in those hilly countries, which are peculiarly subject to long and severe droughts during the hot months. According to Charles Hamilton, India has shown a strange neglect of the culture of it and a knowledge of its usefulness. When an unusually dry season destroys the harvest, the Mahwah tree with its plenty of flowers and fruit shall be a source of great relief for the poor people.

There was a time when the tree-planting was a habit deeply ingrained in our people. This can be seen not only in the remains of the luxurious gardens of the kings and the nobles but a variety of planting in the countryside. We have still many village groves where the elders meet and discuss problems of local interest, children play there in the evening and people celebrate community fairs. In many parts of our country a large scale destruction of trees is being done. So, arid conditions are spreading at an alarming pace. It is quite necessary to restore trees to their proper place in our rural and urban economy. To exert their beneficial influence to the full, trees have to be grown in small and large groups as orchards, farm lots, windbreaks, shelterbelts and finally as forests. The importance of scattered individual trees can also not be minimised in so far as they afford shade protection to crops, fodder for domesticated animals and timber and fuel for rural and urban consumption.

With the rapid increase in the population in recent times, our forests have suffered seriously. As a result, the forest area of the country has declined to a figure well below what is desirable. Planting of orchards has ceased to be popular. How wise were our ancestors who had taken full care to protect the tree-wealth of our country by worshipping them. Now we are describing few very use-

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2. Asiatic Researches, *Vol. I*, p. 257.

ful and important trees which are quite common.

ASOKA TREE

It is a small evergreen tree which is considered to be one of the most sacred trees of the Hindus. They especially worship it on the thirteenth day of the month *Chaitra.* Because of the beauty and perfume of its flowers, they are much used in temple decoration. The tree is the symbol of love and is dedicated to god Kāma. Aśoka is believed to have a certain charm in preserving chastity. Sītā, the wife of Lord Rāma, when abducted by Rāvaṇa, the king of Lañkā, escapes from caress of the demon and finds refuge in a grove of Aśoka tree. In the Buddhist legend when Māyā is conscious of having conceived the child, she retires to a wood of Aśoka trees and then sends for her husband.

The word Aśoka signifies that which is deprived of grief. Mason says that the tree is held sacred among the Burmans because under it Gautama Buddha was born and immediately after his birth delivered his first address. Blatter and Millard observe[3] :

> "According to Sanskrit poetry, its nature is so sensitive that it bursts into blossom and blushes crimson if touched by the hand of a lovely woman."

This tree has a great economic and medicinal value also. In the northern parts of Ceylon the timber is used for common house-building purposes. The bark of the Aśoka tree is used in uterine affections, and especially in menorrhagia. A decoction of the bark in milk is also prescribed. Aśoka ghrita is prepared with a decoction of the bark and clarified butter together with a number of aromatic herbs in the form of a paste. In Orissa, the bark is used as an astringent in cases of internal haemorrhoids. The flowers, pounded and mixed with water, are used in haemorrhagic dysentery.

NEEM TREE

This tree is found throughout India. It is a very useful road-side tree in dry and moderately dry localities. The wood is aromatic, durable and resistant to white ants. It is used for house building furnitures, carts, carved images and agricultural implements etc. The fibre extracted from the bark is used for making ropes. Seeds yield an oil used for burning and manufacturing soap. Neem oil cakes are used as repellent for termites. The twigs of the tree are used to clean teeth. In some parts of our country it is worshipped also.

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[3] Some Beautiful Indian Trees, p. 133.

AMLA TREE

Āmlā is a moderate-sized deciduous tree with feathery light green foliage. It is extensively grown as an ornamental tree and for fruits. Its wood is red, hard, apt to split, durable under water and is used for agricultural implements, well construction and inferior buildings and furnitures. Bark, leaves and fruits are used for tanning. The twigs and wood chips are used to clarify muddy water. The fruit is edible and contains one of the richest vegetable sources of Vitamin C. The dried fruit is used as a shampoo. The fruit is also used in the manufacture of writing inks and hair dyes.

THE INDIAN CORAL TREE (PANGRA TREE)

It is a moderate-sized tree reaching 60 ft. in height with a straight trunk and numerous branches. In Indian agriculture it has been employed from the most ancient times as a shade tree. It was a universal belief that the soil benefits by the presence of this tree. The tree is much used in India for the support of betel, pepper, black pepper and grape vines. It is extensively cultivated as an ornamental tree or for hedges. The wood is light and soft, but is fairly durable.

The economic and medicinal value of this tree is quite important. The tree yields a dark brown gum. The bark is used in dyeing and tanning. It yields excellent cordage fibre. The tender leaves of the tree are eaten. In the Trichonopoly district, the leaves are used as a cattle fodder. Various parts of the tree are used by Āyurvedists. Śushruta recommends the plant for the treatment of snake-bite.

There is a belief that this tree is supposed to flower in Indra's garden. An episode in the Purāṇa relates the quarrels of Rukmiṇi and Satyabhāmā for the possession of the flowers which Lord Kṛṣṇa had stolen from the garden. The leaf is supposed to represent the Hindu Trimurti of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva.

MAHUA TREE

A large evergreen tree flowers in dense clusters near the ends of branches. The tree is too valuable to be cut for its timber. The wood is moderately hard and durable. It is extensively planted in and around villages for the sake of its flowers and fruits. Fleshy flowers are eaten. The succulent corollas are an important article of diet. They are rich source of sugar and contain good quantity of vitamins and calcium. They are used for the preparation of distilled liquors and are raw material for producing alcohol and vinegar by fermentation.

The most useful part of the fruit is seed because of its oil contents. This oil is used in the manufacture of margarine and soap. The oil is edible and a luminant also. The oil cake is used as a fertilizer. The bark is used for tanning.

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AM TREE

It is a large evergreen tree with dark green leathery leaves and a dense rounded crown. Bark is thick, rough and dark grey. Cultivated mangoes show great variety in size, shape, colour and flavour.

The timber is moderately strong and is used for tea-boxes, packing cases, planking, well construction and building purposes, etc. The bark contains a yellow dye. Ām attar is obtained from the flowers by distillation. The best known part of the tree is its fruit. It is eaten raw or made into pickles, chutneys or preserves.

The mango tree is of great importance in India as a fruit tree and a shade tree for avenue and camping grounds. The whole tree is regarded sacred by the Hindus. On any auspicious occasion, Ām leaves can be seen in any house.

IMLI TREE

It is a large evergreen tree found throughout the whole country. It thrives best on deep alluvium. The wood is extremely hard, durable and resistant to insect attack. It is used for rice-pounders, furnitures, oil and sugar mills and agricultural implements etc. The charcoal made from this wood is of excellent quality and is particularly used for gun powder. The bark is used as a tanning material in the preparation of hides. The leaves yield a fixed dye.

It is an excellent avenue tree, which is largely planted for shade, ornament and for the sake of its pods.

BABUL TREE

It is a moderate sized, thorny tree and is almost evergreen. The wood is hard, heavy and durable. The villager finds many uses for this plant. The young plant is used to fence his fields; the saplings provide him with poles and posts for his huts; the leaves and pods are fodder for his cattle. The timber is resistant to white ants. It is used for making beams, rafters, door frames and agricultural implements, etc. Railways utilize this wood for keys, anvils and break blocks.

Babul bark is used for tanning and as an astringent in medicines. Paper pulp can be made out of the bark of young branches. Babūl gum is used in calico printing and dyeing. The twigs are used for cleaning teeth and for making strong baskets. The root-bark is used for flavouring country liquor. An extract of the leaves, bark, or pods is useful for dyeing cotton or silk.

KADAM TREE

It is a large deciduous tree with spreading branches and large shining leaves. The bark is dark grey. The tree flowers and fruits at an early age. It is a useful fast-growing tree which is extensively grown into avenues. The wood is soft and is much used for canoes, tea-boxes, planking, match boxes, furniture and cheap paper, etc.

The name of Lord Kṛṣṇa is associated with this tree.

KACHNAR TREE

It is a moderate-sized deciduous tree with dark brown bark. This beautiful tree has flowers of varied colours. It is frequently cultivated as an ornamental tree, particularly, for the charming sights it presents when it flowers.

"The tree yields a gum with properties of cherry gum. The bark is used in tanning and dyeing. It yields a fibre. The leaves are made into cigarette covers. The seeds are said to yield an oil."[4] The wood is used for making agricultural implements. The young pods are eaten as a vegetable. Almost every part of the plant is used medicinally in India.

The tree is regarded sacred as it is often seen on Buddhist sculptures.

AMALTAS TREE

It is a moderate-sized deciduous tree with a rather open crown. Under favourable conditions it starts flowering at an age of about five years. This is one of the most beautiful Indian flowering trees and is frequently planted for ornamental purposes. The wood is hard and durable and is in demand for house-posts, carts and agricultural implements, etc. The pulp of the wood is a strong purgative. The bark is used for tanning.

From the stem exudes a red juice which hardens into a gummy substance. The flowers are used by the Santāls as an article of food. The root of the tree is useful in fever and the heart disease. It is given as a tonic. Externally, it is said to be a good application for gout and rheumatism.

In Mysore, stakes from the tree are fixed in the ground and worshipped.

SISAM TREE

It is a large deciduous tree with a light crown. The bark is grey. The tree produces fertile seed at an early age.

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[4] Some Beautiful Trees, p. 6.

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It is extensively cultivated as an avenue tree. It furnishes one of the most important timbers of India. Heart wood is brown, very hard and most durable. It is used for building, furnitures, carts, and wheel works, etc. In tea gardens, it provides beneficial light shade and enriches the soil.

BANS TREE

This tree is extensively grown for the production of culms. It is used in the afforestation of dry tracts and stabilization of river banks. Bamboo is used for building, furniture, walking sticks, mats, basket-work and axe-handles, etc. It is a source of principal raw material for paper-pulp. Leaves are used as fodder, young culms are eaten as vegetables.

Bāñs tree is also supposed to be very auspicious. They can be very well seen as poles in Marriage-Manḍapas.

PALAS TREE

This tree is known as the "Flame of the Forest". The flowers of this tree glitter so much in the sunlight that it appears as if the forest is in flames. This tree thrives in black cotton soil. Its flowers make it very attractive for decorative purposes. It is a most important tree for the development of lac insect. A ruby-coloured gum exudes from the tree which is largely used in medicine and also in tanning and dyeing. The young roots yield a fibre which is made into ropes. The inner bark also yields a strong fibre which is used for rough cordage and paper making. The leaves serve as plates. They are used for making umbrellas and as manure.

The wood generally resembles teak in appearance and is used for house-building purposes. It is also used for gunpowder charcoal. The root of young trees is baked and eaten by Mundari children. The leaves are fodder for animals. The bark and the seeds are given for snake bites.

There is a popular belief that the tree is sacred to the moon and is said to have sprung from the feather of a falcon imbued with the Soma. It is employed in Hindu ceremonies connected with the blessings of calves to ensure their providing good milkers. The wood is used in the sacrifice and is frequently mentioned in the Vedas. When a Brāhmaṇa boy becomes a Sādhu, he must eat from a palāś leaf. This is trifoliate; the middle leaflet is supposed to represent Viṣṇu, the left Brahmā and the right Śiva. The red flowers of the tree are offered to gods.

VARUNA TREE

The sacred Varuṇa is a small tree with a much branched head of glossy foliage. The leaf is trifoliate. It looks very handsome when the tree is in full bloom. The wood is used for drums, models, writing-boards and combs, etc. The fruit is edible.

The bark is antipyretic, sedative and tonic. It is useful in some cases of urinary complaints, fever and skin diseases. It also relieves vomiting and gastric irritation. The bark of the stem and root of this tree constitute the principal medicine of the Hindu Pharmacopoeia for calculus affections.

This tree is found planted near tombs in different parts of the world.

CHAMPA TREE

It is a small deciduous tree which is found throughout India. The wood is light and soft and is useful for making drums and musical instruments. This tree is frequently cultivated near the temples, where it meets the demand for flowers used as votive offerings to the gods.

The sap is employed with sandalwood oil and camphor to cure itch and rheumatic pains. The bark is recommended by the Persians as a cure for gonorrhoea and venereal sores. In Bombay, it is used for intermittent fevers. It is generally admitted that the seed of this tree is the antidote in cases of cobra bite. It is said that the tree rarely seeds, and that is because the cobras destroy the pods.

SEMAL TREE

It is a tall tree. The wood is soft, light and perishable. It is one of the best woods for match boxes and match splints. It is in great demand for packing cases also.

The inner bark of the tree yields a good fibre suitable for cordage. The seeds yield cotton, a fibre too short to be spun. The seed oil is used as a luminant, for soap making and for all purposes for which cotton seed oil is used. "Practically every part of the plant is used by Āyurveda practitioners; but only the gum is recognised by Yunāni doctors."[5]

In the Mahābhārata, it is related that the Pitāmaha after having created the world reposed under the tree Śalmuli.[6]

BAEL TREE

It is a deciduous tree with usually strong spines. Leaves are trifoliate. The wood is useful for house-building, cart construction, agricultural implements, tool handles and combs, etc. But the tree is too valuable to be felled for its timber. In the words of J.F. Dastur,[7] "A yellow dye obtained from the rind of the unripe fruit is used in calico printing." An essential oil is distilled from the rind. The fruit is very nutritious. The pulp mixed with lime forms a tenacious cement. The pulp has detergent properties. The gum that exudes from the trunk makes a good adhesive.

The entire tree is supposed to be very sacred. The leaves of the tree are offered to lord Śiva for worship.

BAR TREE

It is a very large tree, having numerous aerial roots. These roots develop into accessory trunks. The wood of the accessory trunks is stronger than the main stem. The wood is hard and durable under water. The wood is used for tent poles, cheap furniture, cart yokes, and boxes etc. Paper pulp can be prepared from the wood. The fibre extracted from the bark and the aerial roots is used for making coarse ropes. The latex is used for making very good bird-lime and also for the oxidation of copper.[8]

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[5] Beautiful Trees, p. 125.

[6] Beautiful Trees, p. 126.

[7] Useful Plants of India and Pakistan, p. 13.

The tree has a religious importance also. In the month of *Jyeśṭha* on the day of *Amāvasyā*, this tree is especially worshipped.

PIPAL TREE

It is a large deciduous tree found throughout India. Its wood is moderately hard and durable under water. It is used for packing cases, match-boxes, spoons, bowls and yokes. The bark contains some tannin and is used for tanning leather and dyeing. Its fibre is used for making ropes. The latex is used for preparing birdlime.

Hindus regard this tree as most sacred. Gautama Buddha got enlightenment under a Pīpal tree.

KELA TREE

The fruit of this tree is a staple article of diet, particularly in South India. It is used as vegetable also. The ripe fruit is quite rich in carbohydrates, minerals and vitamins. Alcoholic beverages are distilled from the ripe fruit. The ash of banana peel is rich in potash. It is a useful source of pectin also. The stem provides edible starch.

This tree is regarded quite sacred. Its leaves are especially used in the worship of the Satya Nārāyaṇa.

GOOLER TREE

It is a large spreading tree, without aerial roots which is found throughout India. Its leaves are dark green and the figs are red when ripe. The wood of this tree is soft and very light. It is not durable but lasts fairly well under water. It is used for cheap furnitures, rough planking, tea chests, toys, cart yokes and packing cases, etc.

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[8] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

The latex of the tree is used for making bird-lime. It is also used in the manufacture of water-proof bonded paper. The leaves are used as fodder for cattle. The figs are edible. Unripe fruits are used as vegetable also. It is very useful for many stomach ailments.

Women worship this tree for prosperity and offsprings. "Under its holy shade, gods, goddesses, men and animals disport themselves, and talk with each other on sacred and profane themes." V. Elwin describes the origin of Dumariā clan from a Gooler tree.

SALA TREE

It is a large tree with glabrous leaves and yellowish flowers. The wood of this tree is most durable and resistant to attacks of white ants. It is one of the most useful timbers in our country. It is used for railway sleepers, bridge construction, well construction, boat building, tent poles, furnitures, carts and carriages, etc. The bark is used as a tanning material. The stem exudes a gum, which is used in the manufacture of shoe polishes, carbon papers, typewriter ribbons and in the inferior quality of paints and varnishes. Oil distilled from the gum is used in the manufacture of perfumes and incenses. Śāla butter, obtained from the seeds, is used as a luminant and as a cooking agent.

The trees which are associated with the birth of Buddha include Śāla also. It is said that he died in a grove of Śāla trees. It is because of these associations that this tree is regarded as most sacred by the Buddhists.

TULSI

This plant is a profusely branched herb about one to two feet in height. It is regarded as one of the most sacred plants. Hindus grow it in their homes and near the temples. The juice of the leaves is stimulating and is used in catarrh and bronchitis. It is a good remedy for earache also. The seeds of the plant are given in the disorder of the genito-urinary system. The root is used in malarial fever. The plant is used as an antidote for snake bite.

The whole plant is so useful that our ancestors granted it divinity. In the month of *Kārtika*, this plant is especially worshipped by females.

2

Origin of Tree Worship

Origin

History and culture of a country have been deeply influenced by its geography. Physical features of any country determine to a great extent, the habits of its people. As early as the stone age, when man was a savage, he subsisted largely on fruits and roots of the tree. The tree was a source for providing him bow and arrow or spear. How could he hunt without the help of these weapons ? How could there be a hand-axe industry without trees? All these facts prove it beyond doubt that the tree has been the best friend of man even in the prehistoric period. So the saying is not wrong, that tree-worship is possibly the earliest and most prevalent form of religion. It was through the worship of the trees that man attempted to approach and propitiate God.[1] Before man developed agriculture and became fully civilized, trees were the only refuge for him in various ways.

There is perhaps no object in nature that adds so much to the beauty of a landscape as a tree. Trees provide food, fodder, timber, medicine, shelter and what not. Thus a tree indeed is the highest and noblest production of the vegetable kingdom, just as man holds the highest place in the animals. Whether standing solitary, or arranged in clumps, or masses, or avenues, trees always give freshness, variety and often grandeur to the scene[2]. Thus the two highest and noblest productions were bound to come closer and closer. Now it is easy to understand how in our remote past men in their efforts to worship the Supreme Being, worshipped trees. Among the various natural objects of adoration, trees took an early place. "Their beauty when single, their grandeur as forests, their grateful shades in hot climate, their mysterious form of life, suggested them as the abodes of departed spirits, or of existing agencies of the Creator."[3] The abstract sacred character of trees

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1. *M.S. Randhawa* : The Cult of Trees and tree worship in Buddhist-Hindu Sculpture, p. 1.
2. Phallic Tree-Worship, p. 2.
3. Phallic Tree-Worship, p. 2.

is not difficult to conceive and as the intellect progressed among the early races of the world, Greeks, Āryans and the Hebrews contributed towards its development. Speaking of the naturalness of tree-worship, James Fergusson observes:

> "Where we miss the point of contact with our religious notion is when we ask how any one could hope that a prayer addressed to a tree was likely to be responded to, or how an offering presented to such an object could be appreciated. Originally, it may have been that a divinity was supposed to reside among the branches, and it was to this spirit that the prayer was first addressed, but any one who has watched the progress of idolatry must have observed how rapidly minds, at a certain stage of enlightenment, weary of the unseen and how willingly they transfer their worship to any tangible or visible object. An image, a temple, a stone or tree may thus become an object of adoration or of pilgrimage and when sanctified by time, the indolence of the human mind too gladly contents itself with any idol which previous generations have been content to venerate."

As regards the origin of the tree-worship, it would have been strange, if they with their changing growth and waving branches should have been disregarded and unhonoured. Sacred trees appear in the earliest mythologies which have been recovered. There is no part of the world in which trees have not been regarded with special reverence. According to Evelyn, 'Paradise itself was a kind of sacred grove, planted by God and given to man'. He further suggests that the groves which the patriarchs had planted in different parts of Palestine, may have been memorials of that first tree shaded paradise from which Adam was expelled. Biblical episode informs about the planting of 'Trees of Life and Knowledge in the Garden of Eden'. Marshall[4] observes :

> "......the two ideals of wisdom and life being so closely interwoven in the Mesopotamian myth, there is reason to suspect that in an earlier version of the Eden story there was only one tree functioning for the both."

In the symbolism of the most ancient nations the sacred tree sometimes figure as a type of the universe, and represents the whole system of created things, but more frequently as a tree of life. According to Jewish tradition, the tree of life was a date-palm. It is figured as a Tree of Life on an Egyptian sepulchral tablet of fifteenth century B.C. and preserved in the Museum at Berlin. Barlow remarks :

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[4] The Monuments of Sāñchi, p. 143.

> "In the 'Tree of Life' of the Egyptians, we have perhaps the earliest, certainly the most complete and consistent representation of this most ancient and seemingly universal symbol, of the Tree of Life, in the midst of paradise, furnishing the divine support of immortality."

Forlong accepts this theory of Barlow. As men came to recognise in themselves two natures—the physical and the spiritual, so these were represented by two trees or by one only. According to Barlow all the beautiful, grand and highly useful trees in every land have been associated with the noble and beneficial ideas which man has attributed to his God or to nature. Forlong observes :

> "The numerous tales of holy trees, groves and gardens repeated everywhere and in every possible form, fortify me in my belief that tree-worship was first known and after it came Lingam or Phallic, with of course, its female form Adama."

All the Eastern literature is full with the stories told of and under the sacred fig tree. Under its holy shade, gods, goddesses, men and animals talk with each other on sacred themes. From holy trees gods and holy men ascended to heaven. In Chinese mythology, the 'World Tree' that supports the universe is peach tree, whose fruit is partaken of by gods and men. In Japanese stories the 'Tree of Life' is mentioned as growing on Horai mountain. To the present hour, we find thousands of barren women worshipping the Pīpal or Baṛ tree to obtain offspring. It is a popular belief that from the rubbing together of the woods of Pīpal, Baṛ and Gooler, the holy fire is drawn from heaven, and before all their species do women crave their desires from God. With regard to Ficus, Forlong observes :

> "The tree has many peculiarities, not only in its leaves and modes of leafing, but in its fruit and modes of multiplying which could not fail to make it of a very holy and important character in the pious, poetical and imaginative mind of the East."

The Ficus tree is often hollow in the centre and if the hollow exists near the base, a Lingam or Yoni stone will be found.

In a country like India the trees of Pīpal, Baṛ and Gooler have offered a cool shelter from the burning rays of the sun. So it was quite natural to see them with great respect. These trees are planted and nursed with care. It is the extreme usefulness of these trees that they have been protected by religious injunctions and their planting is encouraged by a promise of eternal bliss in the future world. The injunctions against cutting a fig tree is so strict that Rāvaṇa is made to say, "I have not cut down any fig tree in the month of *Vaiśākh*, why then does the calamity befall me ?" It proves that as early as the Rāmāyaṇa, the planting of trees was considered to be meritorious.

The celebrated Pañchvaṭi garden where Sītā was imprisoned, has been reproduced by many a religious Hindu, and should any of them not have sufficient space to cultivate the five trees, custom is to plant them in a small pot where they are dwarfed into small shrubs.

Harappan Culture

In India, the tree-worship became quite common in the third or fourth millenium B.C., when there was a highly evolved Harappan culture. Formerly, there was a view that this urban culture was confined to a very limited area. But during the past fifty years, numerous sites between the Himalaya and Western India have been explored indicating a widespread of this Harappan culture. The seals from the Indus valley sites form a class by themselves. "Seal-cutting was one of the most important among the many highly developed arts and crafts. Seals were sawn from blocks of steatite and cut as intaglio, then baked in a small furnace for hardening and glazing the surface."[5] Among the seals of Mohenjo-daro, one is depicting a stylised Pīpal tree with two heads of unicorns emerging from its stem. A seal from Harappa is engraved with the likeness of weeping willow tree with hanging branches. Painted pottery of the Indus valley often includes palms and Pīpal trees, etc. It shows that tree worship was quite popular during those days. In an environment full of danger to life the trees were best friends of men. That is why the Indus people regarded them as beneficent *devatās*. In fact, it was supposed to be a symbol of fertility also. In the words of V.S. Agarwala[6], "On a seal from Harappa a woman is represented with a plant coming out of her womb, a flamboyant symbol of fertility."

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[5] Social, Cultural and Economic History of India, *Vol. I*, p. 25.

[6] Indian Art, p. 25.

Few Sacred Trees

In a Purāṇa, the religious Fig tree is supposed to be an "incarnation of Viṣṇu, the Indian Fig tree of Rudra, and the Palāśa of Brahmā. In the tenth chapter of Bhagvad Gitā, Lord Kriṣṇa declares His divine glories. In the twenty-sixth *śloka*, He says, "Among the trees I am the Pīpal". This shows the importance of the Pīpal tree in the times of Mahābhārata. In the Varāka Purāṇa, the planter of a group of trees is promised heavenly bliss. Thus it is said:

> "He never goes to hell who plants an Asvatha, or a Pichumarda, or a Banian, or ten Jessimines, or two Pomegranates, a Panchāmra or five Mangoes."

The Tithitava gives a different list, substituting two Champakas, three Kesaras, seven Tala-Palms and nine Coconuts, instead of Banian, the Jessamines, the pomegranates, and the Panchāmra.

The Panchavaṭi consists of the Asvatha planted on the east side, the Vilva on the north, the Banian on the west, Āmlā on the south and Aśoka on the south-east. The Skanda Purāṇa recommends a Vilva in the centre, and four others on four sides, four Banians in four corners, twenty-five Aśokas in a circle, with a myrobalan on one side, as the constituents of a great Panchavaṭi.

The *Dūrva*, a kind of grass is an essential article in the worship of all gods. It is said to have originated from the thigh of Viṣṇu. The Pīpal tree makes one rich, the Aśoka destroys all sorrow, and the Neem gives much happiness. The Jāmuna promises heavenly bliss, and the Pomegranate a good wife. The Gooler cures diseases and the Palāś gives protection of Brahma. The Mandār is useful as it pleases the sun, the Bael tree pleases Śiva and Patala pleases Pārvati. The Apsaras are pleased with Semal and the Gandharvas with Jasminum. The Hirda tree increases the number of servants and the Maulsari gives maid-servants. The coconut gives many wives and the vine gives a beautiful body.

If there is an Indian fig tree on the east side of a house, it is always auspicious. Pīpal tree is supposed to be auspicious on the south. The coconut tree near the dwelling house confers wealth on the family and if on the east or north-east, the tree is the donor of sons. The Mango tree is auspicious at every place, and if situated on the east gives wealth. The Bael tree, the Jack tree and the Plum tree are always conducive to prosperity.

The *Dūrvāṣṭami* is one of the many Vratas observed by Hindu females. It is celebrated on the eighth lunar day of the bright fortnight of the month of *Bhādra. Dūrva* grass is born from the body of Viṣṇu, and gives good children, virtue, wealth and salvation. A thread with eight knots and fruits, etc., are presented to *Dūrva* and the following prayer is read:

> "Dūrva, you are called immortal, and you are worshipped both by gods and Asuras. Having blessed us with prosperity and children, fulfil our wishes. As you extend over the earth with your suckers and branches, in the same way give me healthy and immortal children."

Aśokāṣṭami and the Madanotsava are the other vratas in which trees are worshipped.

But the most important instance of tree-worship is the Durgā-pūjā. The festival is a rejoicing at the promising crops in the field. Along with the goddess Durgā, nine leaves are worshipped. On the morning of the first day of Pūja, nine branches with nine leaves are tied together with a plant of clitoria ternata alba, and a twig bearing a pair of fruits with suitable mantras, is stuck in the bundle. Before cutting the twig, the following mantras are repeated:

> "Sriphala tree, you are born on the mountain Mandar, Meru Kailaśa, and at the top of Himāvat, you are always a favourite of Ambikā. Born on the top of the Seri hill Sriphala, you are the resting place of prosperity, I take you away to worship you as Durgā herself.
>
> "Om vilva tree, most prosperous, always a favourite of Śankara, I worship the Devi, having taken away your branch, O Lord! you must not mind the pain generated

> by the separation of your branch. I vow to thee vilva tree born on Himālaya mountain, favourite of Parvasa and embraced by Śiva. You are auspicious in action and a favourite of Bhagavatī; for the sake of Bhawani's words, give me all success."

The bundle is then placed by the side of the idols. The several plants are then separately invoked, and the goddesses presiding over each are worshipped. Different mantras have been prescribed to worship them.

The most beautiful and surprising production of nature in vegetable kingdom is the Banian tree. They are of amazing size and to some extent exempted from decay. The Hindus look upon this tree as an emblem of the Deity. Near these trees the most celebrated Pagodas are generally erected.

An instance of tree-worship amongst the Santāls of Beerbhoom is recorded in Hunter's "Annals of Rural Bengal", as follows:

> "Adjoining the Santāla village is a grove of their natural tree, the Sāl, which they believe to be the favourite resort of all the family gods of the little community... Men and women join hands and dancing in a large circle, chant songs in remembrance of the original founder of the community who is venerated as the head of the village pantheon." "Among the more superstitious tribes, it is customary for each family to dance round every single tree, in order that they may not by any chance omit the one in which their gods may be residing."

3

Tree Worship in Vedic Period

Vedic Flora

Before we discuss the tree-worship in the Vedic period, we will see to the flora found in the home land of the Vedic Āryans. The ordinary term as found in Rigveda and later Saṁhitās was *vrikṣas* while the general name for plants was *virudh*. The plants which possessed medicinal value were called *Auṣadhi*.

Repeated mention of the most celebrated plant Soma occur in Rigveda and later Saṁhitās. Being the plant par-excellence, it was called lord of the forest. The whole of the ninth Mandala of Rigveda and six hymns in other Mandalas are devoted to the praise of this plant. We are told that it grew on Mujavata mountains and the valley of river Gauri. Attempts to identify it have not been successful.

The Pīpal was another tree which was held in great esteem in the Vedic period. It was called horse-stand, because the shade of the tree was used for stabling horses. Vessels were made of the wood of this tree. The tree is constantly mentioned in the Saṁhitās. When it grows to its full length, it is said to dwarf all other trees.

Baṛ was another great tree. Though not known by this name, it was in all probability known in the Rigvedic period. It is frequently mentioned in the Atharvaveda. Its wood was used for making sacrificial bowels.

Among other trees Śalmali or silk cotton tree is mentioned in the Rigveda and later Saṁhitās. The Khadira is mentioned from the Rigveda onwards as a tree with hard wood. Another tree Śimśapa is also mentioned in the Rigveda. It was a beautiful tree which was noted for its hard, strong and durable wood. Vibhidaka tree is also mentioned in Rigveda and later Saṁhitās, the nuts of which were used as a dice. The Atharvaveda and the other later Saṁhitās refer two other important trees, the Śami and the Plakṣa. It is interesting to know that Ikshu or sugarcane was also cultivated in the Vedic period.

A number of flower bearing trees and plants were also known in the Vedic period. The Rigveda mentions Pavaṇa, later known as Palāś. Lotus was very well known during this time. Another flower Kumuda is mentioned in the Atharvaveda.

Among the fruits and fruit-bearing trees, Rigveda mentions Urvaruka and the Karkandhu. The well known fruits were Kuvala, Udumbara, Kharjura and the Bilva. It is surprising that the mango is not mentioned in the Vedic literature at all.

After discussing the flora of the Vedic Āryans, now we shall describe the tree-worship in the Vedic period.

Tree Worship

To a very great extent the foundation of Indian culture and civilization was laid by the people who called themselves Āryans. According to Max Muller[1], "Āryan, in scientific language is utterly inapplicable to race. It means language and nothing but language." The period which saw the rise and expansion of the gifted race is often called the Vedic age after the four Vedas which, as collections of sacred hymns composed by Āryan sages, are contemporary documents of unassailable authenticity[2]. It is well known, that the original Veda is believed by the Hindus to have been revealed by Brahmā and to have been preserved by tradition, until it was arranged in its present form by a sage Vedavyāsa. He distributed the Indian scripture into four parts.

The Rigveda does not present us with any primitive religious consciousness, but with a state of belief which most have been the product of much priestly efforts, and the outcome of wholesale syncretism. Nothing else can explain the comparative magnitude of the Vedic pantheon, which considerably exceeds that of the Homeric poems. In the main the religion revealed to us is in essence simple[3]. The objects of worship were the great phenomena of nature, conceived as alive.

Among the chief deities next to Indra in importance rank Agni and the Soma. To the priest there can be little doubt that

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[1] Collected Works, Vol. X, p. 90.

[2] *P.L. Bhargava* : India in the Vedic Age, p. 1.

[3] Cambridge History, p. 92.

Agni and Soma were of greater importance than Indra, but the latter was more of a national god, and more nearly alive in the hearts of the people. The Soma must have owed its original divine rank to its wonderful intoxicating power. But priestly speculation by the end of the Rigvedic period has succeeded in identifying the Soma and the moon which can indeed be rendered less unnatural by recognising the potent effect of the moon in the popular imagination on vegetation, but which is none the less remarkable in the success in which it finally imposed itself on the religious conscience. The soma hymns are among the most mystical of the Rigveda; and one of the legends, that of bringing of the soma from heaven by the eagle, appears to be a reflection of the fall of rain to earth as a result of lightening which rends the cloud just when the rain begins to fall.[4]

Soma

This god occupies an important place in the Vedic pantheon. In the words of Theodore Goldstucker[5], "Soma is in the Vedic hymns, the god who represents this plant, and one of the most popular deities of the Vedic religion." The reason for this popularity is because of the important part which the plant played in the great Vedic sacrifice. Its alcoholic and invigorating properties must have been a source of great attraction, which the sacrificer experienced when he drank it in the exercise of his function. The properties are constantly described in the hymns addressed to Soma. In some hymns, Soma is said to exhilarate Varuṇa, Mitra, Indra and other gods who take its juice. In a hymn the worshippers exclaim, "We have drunk the Soma; we have become immortal. We have entered into light; we have known the gods. What can an enemy now do to us, or what can the malice of any mortal affect?" In another hymn, the juice of the Soma is said to possess immortality, medicine for the sick, and a remedy for blindness and lameness. Thus exalted with supernatural powers, Soma was gradually exalted as one of the most powerful gods. "He is the friend, helper and soul of Indra; he is the slayer of the cloud-demon Vritra, the destroyer of foes, the dispeller of darkness, the creator of the sun, the upholder of the sky, and the sustainer of the earth, the king of

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[4] Cambridge History of India, Vol. I, p. 93.

[5] Sanskrit and Culture, p. 29.

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gods and men; he is thousand eyed, the most heroic of heroes; he is wise, strong, energetic."[6]

The prayers addressed to Soma are so mixed up with the description of the concrete plant and its juice that it is not easy to keep the two apart. Soma has sharp weapons and a car drawn by a team like Vāyu's. He rides on the same car as Indra and is called the best of charioteers. He is the slayer of the wicked and bestower of cows, horses, food and heroic sons. He comes to the sacrifice and receives offerings on the sacred grass.

The tree abode of Soma is regarded as heaven. He is the lord of that place. He is said to have been brought down from heaven by a eagle. Being the most important of herbs, Soma is said to have been born as the lord of plants. He is the lord of the wood and has generated all plants. He is a king of rivers and king of Brāhmaṇas. In a few of the latest hymns of the Rigveda, Soma begins to be identified with the moon. When the Rigveda refers to the waxing of Soma in heaven for immortality the description is applicable to the moon.[7] In the wedding hymn Soma is spoken of as in the lap of the stars. In the Atharvaveda, Soma several times means the moon. The Brāhmaṇas regularly identify Soma with moon. Because of this identification all the epithets of Soma such as Indu, Auṣadhipati, etc., are given to the moon also. In the classical period of Hinduism, Soma ceases to be worshipped in the character which he has at the Vedic period. He then becomes the god of the moon. This transition from Soma, the plant and its juice, to Soma, the moon is apparently due to the belief, that Amrita, the beverage of immortality, was guarded by the moon. In Vedic hymns, Soma is frequently called as Amrita.

The myths connected with Soma, the moon, are completely different from those relating to the Vedic Soma. As moon, Soma was born from the eyes of Atri, a son of Brahmā, the first god of the Trimūrti and became installed by Brahmā as the sovereign of plants, Brāhmaṇas and planets. But after he had acquired a vast dominion, he became arrogant and licentious, and carried off Tārā the wife of Vrihaspati, the preceptor of the gods. Vrihaspati seeking to recover his bride, and some of the gods siding with him,

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[6] Sanskrit and Culture, p. 29.

[7] *P. L. Bhargava*: India in the Vedic Age, p. 306.

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and others with Soma, a war broke out, which ended in Tārā's being restored to her husband. The result of her stay with Soma was the birth of a son named Budha, who became the ancestor of Lunar dynasty of kings.

Soma is identical with the Avestan Haoma. The home of both the gods is the heaven. In both it is brought by a bird. In both it is king of plants. Both bestow victory over foes. Probably Soma was already known when the Indo-Europeans were still one people, and when one branch went to west, it substituted Madhu for Soma owing to the non-availability of the latter in its new home. The fact that the nectar-bringing eagle of Zeus agrees with the Soma-bringing eagle of Indra shows the ancientness of this beverage.[8]

Naighantuka has included Soma among aerial gods but Macdonell has treated him as a terrestrial god. This view seems to be more correct. To the praise of this god are devoted all the one hundred and fourteen hymns of Book IX of the Rigveda and half a dozen others found in other books. He is also celebrated in parts of four or five other hymns and invoked with Indra, Agni, Pushan, and Rudra in about six more.

Soma Sacrifice

There can be no doubt that the Indo-Europeans, before they separated into different branches had a religion, in which tree-worship occupied an important place. During the Vedic period the trees became the sacrificial stake, or even the royal column venerated at the entrance to all towns and villages.[9] Ordinary Vedic sacrifice was an offering made to win the divine favour. The offerings included milk, Ghee and grains, etc No sacrifice could be completed without the wood. During the Rigvedic period the sacrifice was less elaborate, but there is ample proof that the Soma sacrifice in particular had been elaborated. The labour had been divided among several priests, the chief being Hotri, who recited the hymns, the Adhvaryu who performed the manual actions, the Udgātri who sung the Sāman chants, and several assistants, the number seven being frequently found in the Rigveda. Naturally,

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8. India in the Vedic Age, p. 307.
9. *J. Auboyer*: Daily Life in Ancient India, p. 137.

these elaborate sacrifices could not be undertaken by any except rich men of the tribe and especially the king.

During the period of the later Saṁhitās, the Brāhmaṇas, the Āraṇyakas and the Upanishads, the ritual has grown to a very large proportion. The number of priests required at a sacrifice had increased to seventeen. The animal sacrifice is increasingly elaborated and the Soma sacrifice has developed largely. The simple form of Soma-sacrifice formerly occupying one day now might last from twelve days to a year or years. All these rituals and other festivals do indicate that there can be no sacred fire without trees.

In the words of Priti Mitra, "Soma cult is anterior to all the Vedic worship, it is anterior to all the sacrifices and father of all the gods."[10] Soma has been praised as the creator and lord of all that we perceive.

> "These herbs, these milch-kine and these running waters, all
> These, O Soma, thou hast generated,
> The spacious firmament has thou expanded
> and with the light thou hast dispelled the darkness."[11]
>
> (Rigveda—1.91.22)

Importance of the trees during the Rigvedic period can be seen in the following hymns,

> "...May plants, the waters and the sky
> Preserve us, and woods
> and mountains with their trees for tresses."
>
> (Rigveda—V. 41. 11)
>
> "May the swift wanderer, Lord of refreshments,
> list our songs, who speeds through cloudy heaven.
> And may the waters, bright like castles, hear us,
> as they blow onward from the cloven mountain."
>
> (Rigveda—V. 41. 12.)

In the Atharvaveda we find prayer for the protection against wild beasts,

> "Up from here have stridden three—tiger, man, wolf,
> since hey ! go the rivers, hey ! the divine forest tree.
> Hey ! Let the foes bow."
>
> (Atharvaveda—IV. 3. 1.)

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10. *P. Mitra*: Life and Society in the Vedic Age, p. 2.
11. Translations from the Rigveda are those of T.H. Griffith.

Religious Ceremonies

There are very few religious ceremonies of the Hindus which can be completed without the help of the trees. It appears that Hindus at all the times were quite conscious about the importance of trees in their daily life. In the words of H.T. Colebrooks, "A Brāhmaṇa rising from sleep, is enjoined, under the penalty of losing the benefits of all rites performed by him, to rub his teeth with a twig of the fig tree pronouncing to himself this prayer,

> "Attend, Lord of the forest; Soma, king of herbs and plants has approached thee; mayest thou and he cleanse my mouth with glory and good auspices, that I may eat abundant food."

The following prayer is also used upon this occasion,

> "Lord of the forest ! grant me life, strength, glory, splendour, offspring, cattle, abundant wealth, virtue, knowledge and intelligence."

If a proper withe cannot be found, he must rinse his mouth twelve times with water.

After bathing the Hindu is supposed to worship the rising sun. In this worship also plant plays a vital role while reciting the Gāyatri, the devotee has to hold much Kuśa grass in his left and three blades of the same grass in his right hand. The argha consists of Tila, flowers, barley, water and red-sanders-wood in a clean copper vessel. Religious importance of trees can be very well seen from the birth to the marriage of a Hindu. Even no funeral rites could be completed without the help of the trees. Kuśa grass and bamboo wood play an important role in this last rite of the man.

Conclusion

From the above discussion we can safely conclude that the people in the Vedic age were theists. They contemplated Life chiefly from the spiritual point of view. They worshipped many gods not because of the fear of natural phenomena but for gaining their favours. All the natural phenomena were believed to be guided by their presiding deities. Favourable condition of nature was considered as the boon from the deities while natural calamities were taken to be their wrath. Rigvedic hymns were mainly meant to appease the gods. Under such circumstances it was quite natural that tree-worship occupied a very important place during the Vedic period. The presiding deity of the trees was the great Lord Soma.

An important legacy received by Indian art from its Vedic sources of life and literature includes a large number of symbols in which trees and flowers also occupy an important place. They include Padma, Kalpa-latā and Kalpa-vrikṣa, etc. In fact the Lotus is the highest symbol in Indian art and religion. "...Lotus is the flower of life blossoming on earth; it is the visible sign of consciousness in matter. A gamut of meaning is associated with the lotus." Metaphysical doctrine of the Bhāgvatas explains the birth of the cosmos from a Lotus. Kalpa-vrikṣa was churned as a jewel from the ocean. In the words of V.S. Agarwala[12],

> "It is the symbol of mind, where Kalpa signifies 'thought' or idea. What one wishes under the Kalpa-vrikṣa tree, one obtains."

Superstition has always been active in drawing nice distinction between the auspicious and the inauspicious trees. Often some supernatural properties have been associated with many plants. No tree with fruit or blossoms can be cut down, as the cutter is threatened with destruction of his family.

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[12] Indian Art, p. 53.

4

Tree Worship in Buddhism and Jainism

Birth of Buddha

Buddhism arose in India and after some time became dead in India. But the zeal of early Buddhist missionaries spread the faith far beyond the boundaries of its native land.[1] In the words of W.O. Simpson,[2]

> "It was a protest against the lavish expenditure of blood in the sacrifices of the Brāhmaṇas and was so far successful as to excite the hatred of the hierarchy and ultimately the persecution of the civil arm."

On comparing all the different accounts brought before us, it is seen that the traditions which embody the life of Lord Buddha are in essential points similar. To understand the association of trees with Buddha, it is important to note the fact regarding his life. Buddha is supposed to have had a prior existence of indefinite length, during which he assumed five hundred and fifty births. In those previous births, forty-three times he was the Deva of a tree. This very fact shows the importance of tree-worship in Buddhism. It would not be irrelevant to observe that Buddhism adopted the cult of tree-worship from the older religions which prevailed in the country. "The trees which are associated with the birth of the Buddha are Śāla, Aśoka and Plakṣa. Gautama got enlightenment under the friendly shade of a Pīpal tree which was henceforth called the Bodhi-tree, and he died in a grove of Śāla tree. It was on account of these associations with Buddha that these trees were regarded as sacred by the Buddhists."[3]

To attain the perfect rank of Buddha, one more earthly existence was necessary. So he was born of a Sākya king Sudhodana

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1. *G. K. Nariman*: Literary History of Sanskrit Buddhism, p. 1.
2. Hindu Pantheon, p. 152.
3. The Cult of Trees and Tree-Worship, p. 7.

and Māyā his wife. During the period of pregnancy, Māyā was carefully guarded by forty-thousand deities. As her time drew near its close she asked her husband to go to her parents in the city of Koli. The king consented and the road was levelled; the trees were planted; all the luxuries required for an eastern journey were provided, a cushioned palanquin was her conveyance, and a thousand nobles were her bearers. When she reached to a garden of Śāla tree in bloom, she rested a while to enjoy the fragrance of the flowers and the songs of the birds. She raised her hand to catch a bough of a tree. It bent of its own will, and without pain Buddha was born. In the words of Thomas:

> "She (Māyā) went to the foot of a Śāla tree, and desired to seize a branch. The branch like the tip of a sapple reed bent down and came within the reach of her hand. Stretching out her hand, she seized the branch. Thereupon she was shaken with the throes of birth. So the multitude set up a curtain for her and retired. Holding the branches and even while standing she was delivered."[4]

Mahā Brahma received the child in a golden net, from him, the guardian deities received it on a tiger's skin and consigned it to the care of the nobles who wrapped it in folds of the finest and softest cloth. But Buddha leapt on the ground and where he touched it, a lotus bloomed. He slept seven steps northward and a lotus marked each foot fall. He exclaimed,

> "I am the most exalted in the world; I am chief in world, I am the most excellent in the world, hereafter there is to me no other birth."

In an account, the descent of the Bodhi-Sattva in the form of an elephant is described as a dream of Māyā. On waking she goes to a grove of Aśoka tree and sends for the king, who is unable to enter, until the gods of the pure abode inform him of what has happened. It is further mentioned that she seizes not a Śāla branch but a Plakṣa at the moment of birth. In fact Śāla and Plakṣa are both common trees in the Tarai of Nepal. Chinese traveller Hiuen-tsang visited Lumbini garden in the seventh century A.D. and he mentions an Aśoka tree under which the Buddha was born. It is an interesting point to note that Buddha became an ascetic when he

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4. *Thomas*: The Life of Buddha, p. 33.

drove towards a garden of sports. Worldly attractions could not stop him. One night he left the palace and rested not till he reached in the neighbourhood of Gayā. Here the nobleman was dismissed and the horse evaporated into a divinity. It was under the Pīpal tree that Buddha received enlightenment. Kāma Deva tried his best to disturb the deep meditation of Buddha but all was in vain. "...He obtained the exact knowledge of all circumstances in all times; he understood the mystery of existence, and at dawn of day every evil desire was extinguished."[5] Sākya Muni sang to himself, "I have attained the Buddhaship; I have overcome Māyā; all evil desire is destroyed, I am lord of three worlds."[6]

Bodhi Tree

The Bodhi-tree was seen by the Chinese traveller Hiuen-Tsang. He has given the following account:

> "From this South-west 14 or 15 li, not far from the place of penance, there is a Pi-Po-lo tree under which is a diamond throne. All the past Buddhas seated on this throne have obtained true enlightenment, and so will those yet to come. The Bodhi tree above the diamond throne is the same as the Pīpal tree. In old days when Buddha was alive, it was several hundred feet high. Although it has often been injured by cutting, it still is 40 or 50 feet in height. Buddha sitting under this tree reached perfect wisdom and, therefore, it is called the tree of knowledge. The bark is of yellowish-white colour, the leaves and the twigs of a dark green. The leaves wither not either in winter or in summer, but they remain shining and glistening all the year round without change. But at every successive Nirvāṇa day, the leaves wither and fall, and then in a moment revive as before. On this day, the princes of different countries and the religious multitudes from different quarters assemble by thousands and ten thousands unbidden, and bathe the roots with scented water and perfumed milk; whilst they raise the sounds of music and scatter flowers and perfumes, and whilst the light of day is continued by the burning torches, they

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5. Hindu Pantheon, p. 156.
6. *Hardy*: Manual of Buddhism, p. 181.

offer their religious gifts."

The Bodhi-tree has been the chief object of veneration for Buddhists throughout Asia. Emperor Aśoka lavished great care on it, first surrounding it with a wall surmounted by a wooden gallery, then, twenty-three years later, with yet another wall of brick and stone, so transferring the original sacred spot into a shrine. Bodh-Gaya has remained to this day one of Buddhism's most holy places of pilgrimage. In the words of J. Auboyer :

> "Not all sacred trees were honoured so ostentatiously, but even the humblest village possessed one, as did the capital city's main districts, so these great trees, on the branches of which villagers or city-dwellers came to hang garlands, were with their surroundings carved railings, a familiar sight throughout the country. As a result it was possible to see in a single populated area a sacred tree surrounded by its fence, a domed monument of masonry called Stūpa."

Nirvana

Buddha obtained Nirvāṇa at Kusinārā, when he was encamped in the mango garden of a smith. It is said that he died of pork. But this incident is found only in the Singhalese accounts, so we may count it an interpolation and conclude that Buddha, like Krişṇa, died of old age. We all know that he attained Nirvāṇa at the ripe age of eighty.

Sujata Episode

Before we conclude the theme of Tree-worship in Buddhism, mention must be made of this episode. Sujātā, the holy woman of Buddhism approached the sacred tree to deposit a food offering near its trunk, as she did everyday. Seeing the Buddha motionless, the young woman thought that she was looking at the tree's guardian spirit and marvelled that she was able to contemplate it thus. Undeceived by the Buddha, she realized the supreme being with whom she was confronted and served him joyfully. The fact remains that Sujātā was not otherwise surprised to encounter a guardian spiret of a sacred tree in human form. Doubt concerning the true nature of beings was, indeed, so commonplace that Buddhist monks were in the habit, before admitting a neophyte into the community, of asking him the curious question: "Are you man or serpent?" So that they might exclude him if he did not really belong to the human species.[7]

Tree Worship in Jainism

The sixth century B.C. seems to have been very fertile in giving rise to new religious movements in India. Buddhism and Jainism occupy important places in this movement. Mahāvīra is usually regarded as the real founder of the Jaina religion. But the Jainas claim for their religion a remote antiquity. They tell that Mahāvīra was the twenty-fourth Tirthaṁkara. The first of these was Riṣabha.

Jainism was very close to Hinduism. So it is quite natural to suppose that they must have believed in tree-worship. Sixth Tirthaṁkara Padmaprabhu has a lotus for his mark. The sign of the eighth Tirthaṁkara was moon. We very well know the utility of moon for the plant life. The mark of twenty-first Tirthaṁkara Nimi was a blue water-lily.

We can very well realize that the greater part of twelve years of Mahāvīra spent in self penance and meditation must have been under a tree. In the thirteenth year, Mahāvīra obtained supreme knowledge. At this time he was not far from a Śāla tree. Mahāvīra often laid great emphasis for the security of animals and plants more than human beings.

Jainism survives till today only because of its close association with Hindu customs, institutions and doctrine.

Jaina Art of Mathura

Mathurā was an ancient centre of Jainism also. It appears that the Jaina community at Mathurā was quite rich which is amply proved by the monuments left behind by them. About the third century B.C., a Jaina Stūpa existed at Mathurā which was called Devanirmita Stūpa. The word Devanirmita points to the divine origin of the Stūpa. According to Jinaprabha Suri, it was believed that this ancient Stūpa was erected by Kubera Yakṣi in honour of the seventh pontiff Supārśva. At a later date the Stūpa was encased in bricks, in the time of twenty-third Tirthaṁkara Pārśvanātha. There were many restorations of this Stūpa. In the third stage the Stūpa was converted into a stone Stūpa with the addition of a large stone railing and gateways with a good deal of carving to give it the form of lotus-railing. In the words of V.S. Agarwala[8]:

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[7] Daily Life in Ancient India, p. 151.

> "In pursuance of the art movement during the Kuṣāṇa period, the Jaina community, however, seems to have decided to build a new Stūpa with the same kind of lithic sculptures on the railing as was the style of the age and of which numerous specimens have been found."

A special feature of the second Jaina Stūpa, whose inscriptions are dated in Kuṣāṇa era, is the beautiful Āyāgapatas. "The Jaina Āyāgapatas are things of joy and beauty with perfect workmanship. They illustrate the continuity of symbol worship amongst the Jainas and also the introduction of image worship as combined with the symbols." Āyāgapata No. J. 555 (Smith, Jaina Stūpa, pl. XX) actually illustrates their position round the Stūpa where the worshippers are offering flowers heaped on these platforms. A slab (J 248, Smith, pl. VIII) is entirely based on the conception of symbols. Lotuses and garlands can be very well seen on this slab. In another Āyāgapata known as Svastikapatta in the outer circular band are depicted four auspicious symbols which include a Bodhi-Tree in railing. The sculptures from the second Jaina Stūpa of Kankali Tilā show a good number of Tirthaṁkara images dated from Kuṣāṇa era. There is an image of Mahāvīra having a lotus halo behind the head.

Thus we see that trees and flowers occupy an important place in the Jaina art of Mathurā.

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[8] Indian Art, p. 231.

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Tree Worship in Pre-Gupta Period

Maurya Period

With the emergence of the Mauryan dynasty in the fourth century B.C. begins the continuous history of India. For the first time in the historical period a paramount power was established embracing a large part of south India also. There are various sources to reconstruct the history of this period. "There can be little doubt that the Mauryan empire began with a Brāhmaṇa, as well as a national reaction."[1] It was becoming customary to consult the forest-dwelling Brāhmaṇas on political matters also. Mauryan kings laid special emphasis on the construction of roads. The Greeks make special mention of the royal route from the north-west frontier to Pātaliputra. Trees were planted along the road-side.

During this period greatest share of popular adoration accrued to Śiva and Viṣṇu. Śiva was especially worshiped in the hill regions. The centre of Viṣṇu cult was Mathurā, the second home of the Kṛṣṇa legend, which first arose in western India. Jainas were mostly confined in Bihār and Ujjain while the Buddhists attained a far wider range. But the tree-worship never lost its importance.

When Aśoka ascended the throne, he was an unbeliever, and he desired to destroy the traces of Buddha. He started destroying the trees. He cut through roots; the trunk, branches and leaves were all divided into small bits. He then ordered a Brāhmaṇa to burn them in the discharge of his worship. Scarcely had the smoke cleared away, a double tree burst forth from the flaming fire. Aśoka seeing the miracle repented his crime. He bathed the roots of the old tree with perfumed milk. On the morning of the next day the tree sprang up as before. On conversion to Buddhism, Aśoka abjured violence and became a messenger of peace. He encouraged planting of trees in gardens and along the road side. One of the Aśoka pillars bears the following inscription:

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[1] Cambridge History of India, Vol. I, p. 436.

> "That two designs have been cherished by Piyadasi, one regarding men, and one relating to animals, that everywhere wholesome vegetables, roots, and fruit trees shall be cultivated, and that on the roads wells shall be dug and trees planted, to give enjoyment for both men and animals."[2]

Kalpavriksa of Vidisa

One of the earliest representation of tree-worship is the Kalpavrikṣa of Vidiśā which has been assigned to third century B.C. In the ancient time, Vidiśā was a junction of two great trade routes and was the home of Devi, the wife of Aśoka.

Kalpavrikṣa represents the mythical wish fulfilling tree which produced food, drinks, dresses, ornaments and even beautiful maidens.[3] Coomaraswami has identified it as a banyan tree, and believes that it must have been the capital of the dhvajastambha of a temple of Kubera. At the root of the tree are pots, bags of money, a lotus and conch exuding coins. The banyan tree is regarded sacred to Viṣṇu. He is represented as lying on a banyan leaf in a number of Rājput paintings. The banyan tree was supposed to be bestower of children during the life-time of the Buddha. "In the Dummedh Jātaka, Bodhisattva seeing a crowd of worshippers with bloody offerings at a banyan tree, praying to the Devatā who had been reborn in that tree to grant them sons and daughters, honour and wealth, according to their heart's desire, himself draws near and behaves as a worshipper, offering perfumes and flowers, lustration, circumambulates and so honours the Devatā, though actually only with a view to the ultimate substitution of a higher faith for that of the popular tree-cult."[4]

In the Kathāsaritsāgar the mention of wish-fulfilling tree is made. In this story Jimūtvāhana instead of enriching himself prayed to the tree for removing the poverty of his land. The story runs as below :

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[2] *Fergusson* : Tree and Serpent Worship, p. 254.

[3] The Cult of Trees and Tree-Worship, p. 10.

[4] *Coomaraswami* : Yakṣas, Part II, p. 9.

> "There is a great mountain named Himvata. On that mountain dwelt the king of Jimūtaketu. And in his house there was a wishing tree, which had come down to him from his ancestors. One day the king desired a virtuous son, and it was granted. This son was named Jimūtvāhana. He was a symbol of goodness and compassion. One day after obtaining the permission of his father, he want to the wishing-tree and requested, 'O God thou always givest us the desired fruit; therefore, fulfil today this one wish of ours. O my friend relieve this whole world from poverty; success to thee, thou art bestowed on the world that desires wealth.' The wishing-tree being addressed in this style by that self-denying one, showered much gold on earth, and all the people rejoiced; what other compassionate incarnation of a Bodhisattva except the glorious Jimūtvāhana would be able to dispose even a wishing-tree in favour of the needy ? For this reason every region of the earth became devoted to Jimūtvāhana and his stainless fame was spread on high."

The tree spirit is independent of the tree. It is only the abode of the tree-god. When the tree is cut, the spirit is requested to move elsewhere. It is clear from the following tale of Brahmadatta, the king of Vārāṇasi. The king wanted to build a palace of a single column. The craftsmen were ordered for it. They went into a forest and found a tall and straight tree worthy to be the single pillar of the palace. But it was not easy to bring it. Then the king asked the craftsmen to select a tree in his own garden. Thus a Śāla tree was choosen which was worshipped alike by the village and the town and the royal family. Customary offerings were made to the tree-god, and he was requested to leave his abode. But the tree-god was not prepared for it because the young Śāla trees around him will also be destroyed. So at the hour of midnight the tree-god entered the king's room and requested him not to cut the tree. The king replied that such a tree was his need. Then the tree-god said, "If it must be so, then I have one boon to ask; cut first the top, the middle next, and then the root of me." When the king wanted to know its reason, the tree replied, "There is a good reason for my wish; my kith and kin have grown up round me, beneath my shade and I should crush them if I fell entire upon them; and they would grieve exceedingly." The king was moved at this noble thought of the tree-god and withdrew his order.

Mauryan Art

With the advent of the Mauryas, the obscurity in which the earlier monuments were wrapped rapidly disappears. Structures, built of durable materials, were rare in ancient India. In primitive India, the materials most commonly in use were mud, mud bricks, bamboo canes and other kinds of wood. The simplest kinds of dwellings were constructed of bamboo inwoven with palm branches. At a later date cut timbers came to be used in more pretentious dwellings. From the use of bamboo came the curvilinear type of roof which was afterwards reproduced in timber and subsequently in stone. Log capitals were imitated in stone, and the more finished timbering of walls, roofs, and gateways in the same material were copied by the masons of later days. A striking example of the influence of wood as contrasted with brick construction is to be found in the pillars of the cave temples. In the earliest examples the stone pillars are manifestly copied from wooden prototypes. Arrian has stated that cities on the banks of rivers and in other low lying spots were built of wood. It is believed that Arrian gives this statement on the basis of the writings of Megasthenes, an ambassador in the court of Chandragupta Maurya. It has been endorsed by the discovery of the wooden palisades of Pātaliputra. Many remains of the wooden palace of the Mauryan period have been found in Bulandbāgh and Kumhrār. All these examples show the importance of trees in Mauryan age. Lotus have always been regarded as most sacred in Hindu mythology. We see that the abacus of the Aśokan Lāts are often adorned with a lotus. In the words of A. Grunwedel[5], "It has been declared with reason, that stone building on a large scale was first executed in India in Aśoka's time."

Yaksas

They appear frequently in Buddha legend and iconography. They are usually enumerated in the third rank of secondary gods. Their king is Kubera and his capital is Alakā. The Yakṣas are always represented in human form. At Bharhuta, they appear as dwārapālas at the gateways. Yakṣaṇis also appear on the pillars at the entrances. There is a key to understand the frequent representation of Yakṣas as dwārapālas. Anāthpiṇḍaka asks the Buddha how the Vihāra must be ornamented with paintings or sculptures. The Buddha answered, "On the outside door you must have figured a Yakṣa holding a club in his hand."

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[5] Buddhist Art in India, p. 16.

The Yakṣas preferred to live in big trees. They were best known of all the supernatural beings. Ancient paintings and sculpture depicted the Yakṣas under many different guises, including that of a horse's head on a human body. It appears that the popular tradition had no fixed ideas on this subject.

Buddhist tales provide a good material on mentality and habits of Yakṣas. According to these accounts they preferred to choose their home in a forest, or in some lonely place on the outskirts of town or near the burial grounds. They settled down to found a family after marrying a dryad. Like ordinary mortals, they cherished their children and had friendly relations with other Yakṣas. But they also possessed enemies, chief among them were woodcutters and banyan trees. Banyans with their vast, rooting branches destroyed all the neighbouring trees. Woodcutters were equally dangerous. Though the woodcutters warned the Yakṣa before cutting the tree but the trouble was that they were really an integral part of the tree of their choice. It is for this reason that they preferred to live in sacred trees to be found in every town and village.

Another advantage for the Yakṣas to live in a sacred tree was that it provided an ideal observatory from which they could participate in everyday activities. People often came to consult them and they gave their opinions. The trees in cemeteries, peopled by vultures and carrion-crows, also harboured Yakṣas. These contemplated the scenes of burials and witnessed the torturing of criminals, at the cost, sometimes of seeing their finest branches lopped of to serve as stakes for impalement.

"The relationship between Yakṣas and human beings was based on a sort of mutual blackmail from which both parties derived equal benefit..." The Yakṣas granted them honour, prosperity and longevity. The Yakṣas had a particular mission of making barren women fertile. To gratify them, the trees were surrounded by wooden or stone barriers. An altar was also built nearby. The earth around the tree trunk was carefully cleaned. The villagers often came to hang garlands on the branches of the tree to gain the favour of the Yakṣas. They sprinkled the trunk with sugared water, milk and honey. Cakes were offered on the altar, and incense sticks were left to smoulder. The presence of the Yakṣas in trees was a guarantee for the prosperity of the village in which they lived. It was dangerous to neglect them, since they often stood guard over treasures buried at the foot of their tree. If a satisfied customer failed to fulfil his promise, he may expect reprisal also.

Sunga Period

"The weak rule and dissentions among the later Mauryas gave rise to the disintegration of the empire. This decline had started after the death of Aśoka and there was a scramble for power and a desire among his successors to become independent of each other. The last Maurya Brihadratha was a weak and worthless king. His Senāpati Puṣyamitra Śuṅga killed him before his whole army while the king was reviewing the parade. This event occurred in the year 187 B.C."[6]

There are various theories regarding the origin of the Śuṅgas. The Purāṇas apply the name Śuṅga to the ten sovereigns constituting the dynasty which Pușyamitra founded. In the words of H.C. Ray Chaudhuri[7], "The origin of the usurping family is wrapped up in obscurity." The Mālavikāgnimitram and Divyāvadāna do not use the name Śuṅga. The Harṣacharita also does not apply the designation Śuṅga to Puṣyamitra but to only one of the latest kings in the Purāṇic list.

For the first time the term Śuṅga occurs in the Atharvaveda :

> Prastrinati Stambinireka Śuṅga Pratvantiroshdhirā Vadami; amisumatih kāndinirya viśākhā hriyami te virudho vaiśvadevirugrāh Purushajivinih. (8.7.4)

Here the Śuṅga means root. There are certain medicinal plants which have only one root. In Chāndogyaupanishad, the reference to Śuṅga reads thus :

> "Annena Śuṅgenapo mulamanviccha tatraitacchungamutpatitam Samya vijānihi adbhih Śuṅgena tejomulamanviccha." (6.8.4 to 6)

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[6] *B.C. Sinha* : History of the Śuṅga Dynasty, p. 71.

[7] Political History of Ancient India, p. 307.

Here the term Śuṅga has been used for plumule. In Gobhila Grihya Sutra, Bhatta Narain writes, "Śuṅga Mukulitāh pallavāh." Here the meaning of Śuṅga is new leaf. Śuṅgas might have taken their dynastic name from trees and plants. Trees and plants have been the object of worship from very ancient times. In later period Kadambas and the Pallavas also seem to be inspired by trees. It is quite possible that the tradition of naming a dynasty after trees might have been started by the Śuṅgas.[8]

Śuṅga religious and cultural ideology as evidenced in the sculptures of Bharhuta was unlike that of Aśoka. In fact it was more popular in character and more collective in its aim and origin.[9] The Śuṅga art was patronised by the middle class as well as the rich section of the society.

Bharhuta Stupa

One of the monuments of the Śuṅga period, the most notable is the Buddhist Stūpa at Bharhuta in central India. The Stūpa was discovered by Cunningham in 1873. In fact Bharhuta was situated in the former state of Nagod at a point of the ancient highway of trade and commerce. Cunningham dated the Stūpa between 250 to 200 B.C. But according to Sir John Marshall it was erected about the middle of the second century B.C. J.P. Guha also holds that it was constructed probably around 150 B.C. By the time Cunningham discovered this Stūpa the neighbouring villagers had almost destroyed it. The portion of the eastern gateway and of the railings which encircled the Stūpa were found beneath its ruins and now forms a part of special gallery in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. Some of the fragments of railings pilfered by the villagers were later on discovered by B.M. Vyas, and he placed them in the Municipal Museum, Allahabad.

The Stūpa itself was of brick, of much the same design as the great Stūpa of Sāñchi. Probably similar gateways like eastern one may once have adorned the other entrances also. But it is most unfortunate that the remains of those have not been found. The gateways and the railings are lavishly enriched by the sculptural reliefs, many of which illustrate incidents connected with the life of Sākyamuni. Benjamin Rowland held that although the first Śuṅga ruler persecuted Buddhism, the religion of Śākyamuni, and its art enjoyed of one of its greatest creative periods under the later ruler of this house. According to Dr. B.N. Puri, the Śuṅga art of Bharhuta is the richest in social contents, representing the life of the people, not without humour scenes. James Fergusson, writing on the railings of Bharhuta observed, that it cannot be too strongly insisted that the art displayed here is purely indigenous. Besides the Jātaka scenes, the acrobatic scene on the pillar post is also very interesting.

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[8] *B.C. Sinha :* History of the Śuṅga Dynasty, p. 59,

[9] Maurya and Sunga Art, p. 57.

A number of trees are represented in the sculptures. Cunningham identified seven Bodhi-trees. Pīpal is the Bodhi-tree of the Buddha. It is very accurately carved on Prasenjit Pillar. The trunk is growing out of the building and devotees are shown offering flowers to the tree. Even before Buddha Pīpal was regarded as a most sacred tree. The Soma vessels were made from Pīpal wood. Śākyamuni himself had directed Ānanda to obtain a branch of the Bodhi-tree and plant it in the Vihāra at Śrāvasti. He is said to have observed that, "he who worships it will receive the same reward as if he worshipped me in person."

Divyāvadāna relates that the Bodhi-tree was the favourite object of Aśoka's worship. In Bharhuta sculpture we find the Nāgarāja paying his adorations to the sacred tree. In the relief showing Jetavana monastery the holy mango tree is shown. The other important trees which have been represented in the sculptures are, Baṛ, Gooler, Sirisa, Śāla and Patali. According to M.S. Randhawa the Patali tree of Cunningham is in fact the Aśoka tree. The Tala tree, the well known palmyra palm, is depicted in one of the medallions. It is a common tree in the southern and eastern India. The Aśoka tree is shown in association with a Yakṣaṇi. Yakṣa and Yakṣaṇis figure prominently at Bharhuta. The four gates of the Stūpa are shown as being guarded by Yakṣas. Nāgkesara tree is shown with Chandā Yakṣaṇi. It has four petals enclosing a bunch of golden stamens. Coomaraswami regards the Yakṣaṇis as an auspicious emblem of vegetative fertility. In fact women and tree motifs are very frequently seen in the Buddhist sculptures of Bharhuta. In the Bharhuta sculpture lotus has been carved with great perfection. The medallions are full with lotus flowers. We also find here a side feature in the form of garden sports known as Udyāna-Krida, in which women are shown as standing under the various flowering trees, especially Śāla and Aśoka and enjoying such sports as Śāla-bhanjikā. These are depicted at Bharhuta and continued in the railings of later times.

The lotus flowers with buds and leaves and creepers play an important part in the decoration of Stūpa. In the words of V.S. Agarwala, "One of the most important features of Stūpa decoration at Bharhuta is the presence of meandering creepers showing ornaments and textiles and other objects of food and drink from the Kalpavrikṣa trees or creepers in the Uttarakuru country." Actually it represents the Kalpa-Latā, the wishful-creepers of heavenly origin whose tendrils fulfil all desires. The flowery description of the land of Uttarakuru has been received from great antiquity, and is reinforced by the literary tradition recorded in the epic literature and Purāṇas. In the Mahābhārata the land of Uttarakuru with all kinds of plenty in fruits and flowers and with trees producing all objects of desire is conceived in the northern direction adjacent to Meru. A Pāli gāthā sums up the virtues of this auspicious tree as follows :

"Vāridā Purimā sākhā annapānachcha dakkhiṇā
Nārida Pachchhimā sākhā sabbakāma cha uttara."

In the opinion of V.S. Agarwala, the above tradition holds key to many a scene on the gateways and railings of the great Stūpas of Bharhuta and Sāñchi. On the Bharhuta Stūpa Kalpavrikṣa is a recurrent theme of decoration. It alone provides all the dainties and fineries for the fair women of Alakā. The Bharhuta Master had gone into great length to illustrate the Kalpa-latā motif producing ornaments, clothes, wines and lac-dye. V.S. Agarwala observes,[10] "The Bharhuta Stūpa is truely a great possession—great for its beauty of sculpture and depth of meaning."

Sanchi Stupa

According to S.C. Kala, Bharhuta and Sāñchi occupy the same place in the domain of Indian art, which is occupied by the epics in the domain of literature.

"The Bharhuta Stūpa at Sāñchi, in district Vidiśā was rediscovered by General Taylor in 1818. At this time it was in a good state of preservation. Sāñchi is almost an exhaustive mine of information in regard to contemporary civilization.''[11] According to Marshall[12], "The history of Sāñchi starts during the reign of Aśoka in third century B.C. and covers a period of some thirteen centuries, thus synchronising almost exactly with the rise and fall of Buddhism." It is to the period of Śuṅga supremacy that several of the most important monuments at Sāñchi, probably belong, namely the second and the third Stūpas, the grand balustrade and the stone casing of the Great Stūpa and pillar No. 25. The sculptures of these and other monuments is full of promise.

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[10] **Indian Art, p. 142.**

The Stūpa of Sāñchi is said to have existed even before Aśoka on the basis of a story in the Mahāvaṁśa. But this may be an exaggeration. Ordinarily, it is supposed, to have been erected during the time of Aśoka. In the words of M.K. Dhavalikar, "The additions such as balustrades and the Harmikā were made during the Śuṅga regime." James Fergusson who described the Stūpa of Sāñchi was very much impressed by the reliefs on the Toraṇas in which a number of trees were shown being worshipped. There are a number of reliefs showing the worship of the Bodhi-tree. A panel on the east gateway shows the worship of the Pīpal. Branches of the Pīpal are projecting out of the window of a building. At the sides, branches of mangoes and flowering Aśoka are shown. The sculpture on the western pillar of the northern gates illustrates a Jātaka scene. Here the monkeys are offering honey at Vaiśāli. In this the leaves of Pīpal tree are accurately drawn and the tree is garlanded. In a corner are flowering branches of Aśoka. At the eastern gate of Stūpa No. 1, "miracle walking over water" is shown. The lake is covered with lotuses. The trees shown in this scene are Aśoka, Gooler and Mango. In the words of Fergusson[13], "About one-half of the bas-reliefs at Sāñchi, however, represents religious acts, such as the worship of Dagoba or of trees."

In the sculptures of Sāñchi Yakṣaṇis have been shown under Aśoka and Mango tree. In the words of M.S. Randhawa,[14] "The motif of flowering Aśoka is very frequently shown in the sculptures of Sāñchi." Lotus flowers, buds and leaves are carved in a number of medallions. The lotus is a symbol of water which supports all life. In many sculptures lotus creepers are issuing from the mouths and navels of dwarfs and animals. Flowering branches are issuing from the mouth of a tortoise.

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[11] *B.C. Sinha* : History of the Śuṅga Dynasty, p. 158.

[12] A Guide to Sāñchi, p. 7.

[13] Tree and Serpent Worship, p. 95.

[14] The Cult of Trees and Tree-Worship, p. 32.

In the words of V.S. Agarwala,[15] "The floral designs have a unique richness and exuberance which are among the greatest beauties of this monument." According to Marshall motifs taken from the plant world have at all times been handled with exquisite taste of the Indian artists, but never more exquisitely than by the sculptors of Sāñchi with the exception of the honey suckle pattern on the south gateway and the grape vine on the west gateway. Percy Brown[16] observed, "Under both the Brāhmaṇical dynasties (Śuṅga and Sātavāhana) the Buddhists on the whole appear to have been treated with toleration as the numerous monuments produced by them plainly testify." He further held, "The railings at Sāñchi on account of the largeness of its proportions and austerity of its treatment is one of the most impressive productions in the whole range of Buddhist constructional art."

It is strange that Bharhuta died down with the Śuṅgas while Sāñchi continued to flourish in the time of Āndhras and Kuṣāṇas. These two Stūpas serve as commentaries on the many religious cults including tree-worship that were prevalent in those days when they were constructed.

Bodh-Gaya

The railing of Bodh-Gayā occupies an important place in the history of art of early Indian school. The railing was disposed in a quadrangle, but in other respects was designed and adorned in much the same way as the rail at Bharhuta. This railing has been dated about first century B.C. It enclosed the space where the Buddha walked after his great experience. As at Bharhuta, many of the sculptures are crude but their style is more developed than that of Bharhuta reliefs. According to Cunningham, there is a considerable variety depicted in the small medallions and amongst them are to be found illustrations of the famous Kalpadruma, the Indra-Śālā-guhā, and the Jetavana vihāra scene.

The sculptures on the railing of Bodh-Gayā also represent tree motif. On one of the panels a Vrikṣa-Devatā is shown offering food as drink to a traveller. This tree resembles the Pīpal, only the projecting hands of the tree-god can be seen. In one hand there is a plate with a *roti* and the other hand is containing a water-vessel. Similar scenes have been shown in the sculpture at Bharhuta and Mathurā. In the general scheme of decoration lotus occupies an important place. Mithuna figures shown with Kalpavrikṣa tree producing ornaments hanging on the levelled corners of the pillars are beautiful.

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[15] Indian Art, p. 153.

[16] Indian Architecture, p. 13.

Bodh-Gayā is the site where the Buddha got enlightenment. It is said that Upagupta pointed out to Aśoka that the Buddha obtained his enlightenment at this place and the latter built here a Bodhi temple. The tree was known as the Tree of Wisdom. The temple at Bodh-Gayā underwent several restorations, the most important being in the Gupta period.

Kusana Period

The Yueh-chi were a nomadic tribe of north-western China. About the middle of the second century B.C., they were expelled from their land by a tribe Hiung-nu and were compelled to migrate westwards. For some time they occupied the territory of the Sakas but were driven further west into the valley of the Oxus. They spread over Bactria and Sogdiana. Gradually they lost their nomadic habits and divided their territory into five principalities. In course of time the Kuṣāṇas, a section of the Yueh-chi became predominant and united the five principalities. Their leader was Kujula Kadphises I. He laid the foundation for a strong Kuṣaṇa monarchy. He was succeeded by Kadphises II, who extended the Kuṣaṇa power further into the interior of India. His coins show that he was a worshipper of Śiva. Kadphises II was succeeded by the greatest Kuṣaṇa ruler Kaniṣka. There is much controversy about the date of Kaniṣka. He has been placed between 58 B.C. to 78 A.D. Rapson and Thomas hold that Kaniṣka was the founder of the Saka era which begins from 78 A.D.

Kaniṣka was a great king. His fame rests chiefly for his patronage to Buddhism. He became a Buddhist at the beginning of his reign is proved by numismatic and epigraphic evidence. Because Kaniṣka was a devout Buddhist, we can safely assume that the cult of tree-worship must have been popular during his times. He summoned the last great Buddhist council at Kundalavana in

Kaśmir. After Kaniṣka, his successors proved weak and ineffective. And after Vāsudeva, the Kuṣāṇa empire lost its unity and began to break up about the middle of the third century A.D.

Mathura School

The rulers of this house are remembered for their patronage to literature, art and religion. During their times Mathurā became an important centre of art which produced many specimens of excellent sculpture. Among Mathurā sculptures carved bracket figures of woman and tree motif were discovered. These sculptures are carved out of red sand-stone. The trees under which the women stand are in each case of a distinct kind.

The catalogue of Mathurā was compiled by Vogel in 1910. Aśoka and Kadamba trees are mentioned by name for the first time. The most popular motif with the Mathurā sculptors were leaves and flowers of Aśoka tree. These trees are associated with dancing girls. Vrikṣa Devatās were symbols of fertility and they were worshipped by barren women for children. Aśoka is always associated with young and beautiful women. This tree was supposed to flower only when its roots were pressed by the foot of beautiful young girls.

Apart from Aśoka tree we find other trees depicted in the sculptures of Mathurā. In one we see a woman under a Kadam tree. This tree is closely associated with Lord Kṛṣṇa and it must have been a common tree in the age of Mahābhārata. The third unidentified tree according to M.S. Randhawa is Champaka and the fourth tree is supposed to be Nāg-kesara. The beautiful leaves and fragrant flowers of Nāg-kesara must have been quite popular in ancient India. Aśvaghoṣa mentions a number of beautiful trees in his Saundarānanda. The fifth tree in the Kuṣāṇa sculpture has been identified as son-Champā. It is a dwarf tree and its flowers are exquisitely scented. The motif of the woman plucking flowers from a distended bough is continued on the railing pillars of Mathurā during the Kuṣāṇa period.

In the Mathurā sculpture of Kuṣāṇa period we get the earliest image of Brahmā. He is depicted with four faces holding his right hand in Abhaimudrā. On the reverse is carved an Aśoka tree. The worship of Brahmā continued in the Mediaeval period. But later on during the Muslim rule Brahmā went into the background. At present the one living temple of Brahmā is at Puśkara near Ajmer. At Mathurā school the ancient typical figure of Lakṣmi continued to be depicted as a female figure standing on a lotus and holding two lotuses in two hands, and with a pair of elephants sprinkling water on the head of the Goddess with two inverted jars held in the two trunks.

We can safely conclude that during the Kuṣāṇa period in the first three centuries of Christian era Mathurā was a most important centre of art. In the words of V.S. Agarwala, "The reigns of the imperial Kuṣāṇas like Kaniṣka, Huviṣka and Vāsudeva form the Golden Age of Mathurā sculpture attaining to a perfection of art style which has seldom been equalled in Indian art history."

Gandhara Art

In the Gandhāra art Buddha is depicted as seated on a lotus-throne supported by two elephants. Termez on the north bank of Oxus was an important outpost of Graeco-Buddhist art. In the vicinity of Termez the remains of an ancient Buddhist monastery have been found. The subject of this notable frieze was inspired by an Indian conception, viz. the Kāma-Latā, the creeper producing the beautiful sons and daughters of the God of Love. In fact this motif was derived from the Kalpavrikṣa. The Gandhāra artists did try the woman-and-tree motif showing a female figure standing under a tree in Śālabhanjikā pose. "But both the figures are extremely weak and the experiment remained without any success." Gandhāra artists have tried to borrow motifs and subjects from the art of Mathurā and central India. But their style is inferior.

6

Tree Worship in Gupta Period

Fall of Kusanas

After the fall of the Kuṣāṇas and the Sātavāhanas, the Gupta dynasty rose to power. The Nāgas ruled at Mathurā, Vidiśā and Padmāvati and the Deccan witnessed the rise of the Vakātakas. Gradually all these powers became subordinate to the Gupta dynasty. The first independent ruler of this dynasty was Chandragupta I who ascended the throne in 319 A.D. He was succeeded by his son Samudragupta who was the greatest of the Gupta Kings. His empire comprised all the fertile and populous region of northern India. His son Chandragupta II put an end to the dynasty of the great Satraps of Mahārāṣṭra. After Chandragupta II, Kumaragupta I and Skandagupta were the other two great rulers of this dynasty. With the death of Skandagupta in 467 A.D., the Gupta dynasty began to disintegrate. During the sixth century A.D., the dynasty was nothing worth name. But the two hundred years of the Gupta rule forms one of the brightest history of India. It was a golden period in the field of literature, art and religion.

Revival of Hinduism

Gupta kings were Brāhmaṇical Hindus. So the period has been described as the age of Hindu renaissance. But the rulers of this dynasty were perfectly tolerant of Buddhism and Jainism. The revival of Hinduism was accompanied by the increased use of Sanskrit also. There is general opinion that Kālidāsa, the greatest of the Sanskrit dramatist, belonged to this age. He describes the Aśoka tree in some of his plays. In Ritusaṁhāra, he gives a charming description of our many beautiful trees which flower from month to month. "In his description of spring, he describes the mango tree bent with clusters of coppery red leaves, and the branches covered with yellow fragrant blossoms shaken by the March breezes, which kindle the flame of love in the hearts of women." During this period a festival was celebrated known as Aśoka—Puṣpaprachāyikā in which the young women collected

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Aśoka flowers and inserted the bunches of its flowers in the mops of their hair. Kālidāsa has very beautifully described the scene of awakening of Aśoka flowers in his play Mālavikāgnimitram. In this play, the heroine Mālavikā dances under an Aśoka tree and hits the tree with left foot so that it may flower. We have said it earlier that there was a popular belief in ancient India that the Aśoka tree will flower only when its roots were pressed by the foot of a charming young girl. In the words of M.S. Randhawa[1], "No wonder the Aśoka was held in such high esteem, that no garden was regarded complete without it in those joyful days of India."

Puranas

It was during the age of the Guptas that the Purāṇas took their final literary form. In the Purāṇas trees have often been identified with gods. In the Padma Purāṇa, the Pīpal tree is an incarnation of Viṣṇu, Baṛ tree of Rudra and Palāśa tree of Brahmā. In the Varaka Purāṇa, the planter of a group of trees of a particular species is promised heavenly bliss, and it is needless to point out that from the names of the trees recommended, the extensive utility of the act must be acknowledged. The Skanda Purāṇa recommends a Vilva in the centre and four others on four sides, four banians in four corners, twenty-five Aśokas in a circle, with a myrobalan on one side, as the constituents of a great Panchavaṭi.

Sculpture

The art in the Gupta period reached a remarkable level of excellence. The famous Buddha image of the Gupta period from Mathurā, has the leaves of Pīpal tree carved behind it. The sculptures of the Gupta period may be regarded as the best that India has ever produced. The excellent buildings of the Gupta period have been destroyed by the Muslim conquerers, but the little that has survived, suffices to prove the excellence of their architecture. The stone temple at Deogarh in the district of Jhāñsi is one of the finest monuments of Gupta art. Anecdotes from the Rāmāyaṇa are carved at the sides of this temple. The scene of chopping of the nose of Śūrpaṇakhā is laid in a hut covered with a flowering Aśoka. The Aśoka is closely associated with Sītā. When she was a prisoner in Lankā, she was sheltering in a grove of Aśoka trees. There is a legend that Sītā and Rāma were so much enchanted by the

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[1] The Cult of the Tree and Tree Worship, p. 37.

Aśoka trees that they made this grove their home for some time. The author of the Skanda Purāṇa relates that on return from exile to Ayodhyā, Sitā did not forget the charm of the forest trees. The Aśoka tree is beautifully carved in the Deogarh panels. It appears that the sculptors were very much familiar with Aśoka trees which were commonly grown. If we compare the work of these sculptors with those of Gandhāra, we shall see that their lotuses and trees are often unrecognisable. According to Vincent Smith, "It is due to the fact that they were working in the cold temperate region of Peśāwar and Rāwalpindi where Aśoka trees and lotuses do not grow."

At Mathurā the ancient typical figure of Lakṣmi continued to be depicted as a female figure standing on a lotus, holding two lotuses in her two hands with a pair of elephants sprinkling water on the head of the goddess with two inverted jars held in the two trunks. The worship of Lakṣmi as the goddess of prosperity was becoming popular and popular. By the Gupta period she is frequently depicted as the consort of Viṣṇu.

Kālidāsa has given a graphic picture of the wishfulfilling trees growing in the capital of the Yakṣa king. The four kinds of female decorations comprised clothes, ornaments, flowery garlands and unguents, all of which were bestowed on them by heavenly trees. We may also note here the sacred sign of Śrivrikṣa, "Tree of Goddess Śri" which is the Indian tree of life. This is referred to by Varāhamihira as a decoration on one of the bands of a doorway, and actually represented on Brāhmaṇical and Buddhist shrine-doors of the Gupta period.

The Gupta period clearly shows that the Tree-worship was still popular in the golden days of Hindu renaissance. There is a view that with the development of the Buddha image during the Gupta period, the trees were relegated to the background.

7

Tree Worship in Mediaeval Hindu Period

Fall of Guptas

The fall of Gupta empire in the sixth century A.D. witnessed the state of confusion and anarchy in northern India. Many petty states arose and the political unity of the country was broken into pieces. At such a critical time Harṣavardhana of Puṣyabhūti dynasty, in the first half of the seventh century A.D. attempted for the unification of the country under one rule. To a very great extent he was successful in subjugating the whole of upper India including the greater part of Bengāl, and the eastern part of the Punjāb. But when he turned his arms against the Deccan, he was defeated by the great Chālukya king, Pulakeśin II. Harṣa had to accept Narbadā as the southern frontier of his dominion. He died in 647 A.D.

Harsa

He was a man of religious devotion. At first he was a worshipper of Śiva and the Sun, but in the later part of life he became more and more inclined towards Buddhism. In his patronage to Buddhism he tried to emulate Aśoka. He forbade the slaughter of animals and trees were planted for the benefit of all. The poet Bāṇa, the author of Harṣacharitam and Kādambari was a personal friend of Harṣa. Bāṇa in Kādambari mentions the bunches of ornaments shooting forth from wish-fulfilling creepers.

"Parisphurdābharṇa samuheneva Kalpalatānivahena,"

The gift of such divine ornaments was considered as the highest blessing conferred on a human being.

After the death of Harṣa the vast empire which he had built up again fell into pieces. There was again confusion and anarchy. The numerous kingdoms that sprang up, figure separately in the history of the period that followed. A connected account of these kingdoms is out of our reach. One special feature of this period is that there was no paramount power and local Hindu kings were often at war with one another. This period from the death of Harṣa to the Muslim conquest can be called at the Rājput age.

Rajput Period

The religious history of India during the Rājput period is a record of all round progress of Hinduism. Buddhism had lost ground and Jainism remained only in a limited area. Of course the advent of Islam in the beginning of the eighth century provided new values and drew converts to its fold. Islamic iconoclasts not only broke the images but also destroyed the vast forest of northern India. In the words of M.S. Randhawa,[1] "Not only trees were cut but saplings were mercilessly nibbled by the flocks of goats, who converted west Punjāb from a green and flourishing land into a virtual desert." Randhawa further held that the great tradition of woman and tree motif in sculpture came to an end in the 12th century. But the trees occupy an important place in the fable literature of the mediaeval Hindu period.

Sculpture

Indian architecture of the Mediaeval Hindu period is generally treated under two heads : Indo-Āryan and Dravidian. Indo-Āryan style consists of an inner cell to contain the idol, a covered or open portion in front of the cell for the devotees to assemble, a path round the cell for the purpose of Pradakṣiṇā and a Śikhar above the cell. Though innumerable temples have been destroyed by the Muslim invaders, yet a sufficient number remains for a detailed study. We can safely say, "where there is a temple, there are trees also". The tree has not lost its utility and value. It has been often said that Indian art declined after the Gupta period. But this is not fully justified. Mediaeval sculpture has its own grandeur, richness and charm. They followed in great details the principles laid down in the texts on sculpture.

Now the sculptors of Mediaeval period were obsessed with the beauty of female form and sensual charm conjugating human couples. Such scenes can be seen in the sculptures of Khajurāho and Grissā. But the classical woman and tree motif was not entirely forgotten. "In the Lakṣamaṇa temple at Khajurāho there is a charming bracket figure of a woman under a mango tree. On the walls of Rājrāni temple at Bhuvaneśwara is a proud Amazon holding the branch of a flowering Aśoka. In the Sun temple at Koṇārka, constructed a century later, some figures of women are shown holding branches of trees. The trees are carved in a purely symbolic manner giving no indication of species. Such figures are, however, very rare, and we generally notice the transformation of the Yakṣaṇis into charming female musicians which adorn the roof of the temple.

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[1] The Cult of Trees and Tree Worship, p. 57.

8

Tree Worship in South India

By South we mean here the whole of the Southern peninsula. If the Dravidians were the architect of the Harappa culture in the third or fourth millenium B.C., the earliest example of tree-worship can be seen in their seals. A Pīpal tree is depicted in one of the seals of Mohen-jo-daro. A seal from Harappa is engraved with the likeness of a weeping willow tree with hanging branches.

If the hypothesis is correct, the Āryan invasion of India forced the Dravidians to migrate to the south. In the words of N.K. Dutta,[1] "With regard to northern India it may be said with more or less truth that the Āryanisation was effected principally through conquest. But the case deems to be entirely different in the South." As the tradition records, sages took a prominent part in the diffusion of Āryan culture in the south. Often they did it at a considerable risk to their lives. Sage Agastya became very successful in spreading the Āryan culture among the Dravidians of southern India. There he became so popular, that in later times he came to be regarded by the Tamil people as the founder of their language. The tradition recorded in the Rāmāyana tells us that when Rāma went to the south, he found the hermitages of the Brāhmaṇa sages in the forest. Trees were playing their due role in their lives. Āryans were the great lovers of trees and plants and so were the Dravidians as seen in their seals. The intermixture of these two races in the south must have added strength to the cult of tree-worship.

Satvahanas

The major part of southern India upto Mysore formed part of the Mauryan empire during the reign of Aśoka. But we do not know the relations of Aśoka's successors with the people of the south. With the spread of Buddhism in the south, tree-worship must have become quite popular over there. We do not have a connected history of the far south. But as regards the Deccan, the fall of the Maurya Empire was followed by the rule of the Sātvāhanas. According to the Purāṇic version, it lasted for four-and-a half centuries from about 230 B.C. There is a great controversy regarding the date of the Sātvāhanas. R.G. Bhandarkar wrote in 1928 that the Sātvāhanas ruled over Deccan from 73 B.C. to 218 A.D. The fact remains that the exact date of the establishment of the Āndhra rule cannot be determined.

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[1] Āryanisation of India, pp. 86-87.

Sanchi

The building activity at Sāñchi began during the time of Aśoka who raised a brick-built Stūpa. According to V.S. Agarwala, the gateways and the railings were added during the early Āndhra period about the second half of the first century B.C. There is an inscription on the south gateway top architrava facing the Stūpa, stating it to be the gift of Ānanda, foreman of the artisans of king Sri Sātakarṇi, ruler of the Āndhra dynasty. The most pleasing feature of the gateways are the female figures standing under the dense foliage of trees. We have fully discussed the Stūpa of Sāñchi in the Śuṅga period. So there is no need to repeat it again.

Bhaja

The old Vihāra at Bhājā in Western Ghats in Maharashtra is the earliest among the Buddhist rock-cut architecture. The sculpture in the Bhājā is most remarkable and almost unique in relief. The two reliefs are however most important. They are carved on the right and left sides of the cell-doorways at the east end of the verandah. On the left side, we see a royal personage, driving in a chariot with four horses. This figure has been identified as Sūrya. The relief on the right side shows a figure which has been identified as Indra riding on his elephant Airāvata. The remainder of the landscape depicts a couple of trees within railing and groups of mithuna pairs seated enjoying music and dance.

According to V.S. Agarwala, the two reliefs do not represent either Sūrya or Indra. They in fact depict the visit of king Māndhāta to the Uttarkuru country. "In the second relief on the right, we see king Māndhāta actually entering the garden city of the Uttarkuru country. According to the Mythical tradition, the land of Uttarkuru is an idyllic region where men and women live in eternal youth and happiness with their wants supplied by the wish-fulfilling tree. Here we actually have the representation of Kalpavrikṣas. Coomaraswami wrongly regards this as a representation of human sacrifice. Actually the mithuna pairs are being born from the Kalpavrikṣas. The tree in the centre at the bottom is shown with ornaments suspended from its branches.

In the Chaitya hall at Bhājā, there is very little sculpture. But the five emblems shown on the pillars include a lotus also.

Amaravati

Amarāvati Tope first attracted the attention of Colonel Mackenzie in 1797. The Rājā of Chintapilly in whose territory the Amarāvati Stūpa was situated was a Śaivite. There was a Śiva temple near the Stūpa. The Rājā was determined to erect a city on the spot and on looking for building material despoiled the Stūpa and several other mounds. Many sculptures were utilized for making lime. Mackenzie returned to the spot in 1816 as Surveyor-General of Madrās. He now employed all means to save the remaining sculptures. His assistants, Hamilton, Newman and Burke carefully copied the sculptures. In the words of Fergusson[2], they are unsurpassed for accuracy and beauty of finish by any drawing of their class that were ever executed in India. Mackenzie sent several specimens of these sculptures to Calcuttā, Madrās and London.

In 1840 when Walter Eliot was commissioner in Guntur, he excavated a portion of the monument and sent a large collection of sculptures to Madrās where they lay exposed to sun and rain for 14 years. In 1856, they were sent to London. No care of the sculptures was taken until they were discovered by Fergusson in 1867.

The sculptures of Amarāvati were executed under the patronage of Sātavāhana kings. In the words of V.S. Agarwala,[3] "When complete in its full glory in the second-third century A.D., it was worthy of the honour of being reckoned as a monument of world art." According to Coomaraswami, Amarāvati reliefs are highly naturalistic. The sculptures of Amarāvati show a great beauty of carving and give evidence of the natural evolution of style over a period of five centuries. On the basis of style and epigraphic evidence, it has been divided into four periods. Mature phase covers the period between 150 A.D. to 200 A.D. This was the period when Nāgārjuna was preaching the doctrine of Mahāyāna. The usual Buddhist symbol of Bodhi-tree is carved in a number of sculptures. In a beautiful sculpture footprints of the Buddha and the Pīpal tree are being worshipped.

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[2] Tree and Serpent Worship, p. 150.

[3] Indian Art, p. 283.

In the words of James Fergusson, "On the other hand, the tree worship nearly maintains the same relative position of importance at Amarāvati that it did at Sāñchi but with this important qualification. Where the tops have anything in common, it is most apparent in those points in which they approach nearest in age. We find, consequently, the tree-worship most important in the central building, next in the great Rail, but nearly evanescent in the sculptures of the inner Rail. It only occurs once in the place of honour on any Dagoba in our collections, and never on the frieze, nor on the wall. The change is so gradual that it can hardly be accidental, and I am on the whole inclined to believe that tree-worship was to some extent losing its importance before the sculptures at Amarāvati were complete."[4]

Nagarjunakonda Stupa

It is situated on the right bank of the Kṛṣṇā river in Guntur district of Āndhra Pradesh. Nāgārjunakoṇḍa means "the hill of Nāgārjuna". It is named after the Buddhist saint Nāgārjuna. This Stūpa was sited on the route towards the Karṇāta country, sixty miles above Amarāvati. Nāgārjunakoṇḍa had a very safe location. From the three sides it was protected by hills and on the fourth side by the river Kṛṣṇā. Therefore, it was selected as the capital of Ikṣavāku kings who ruled this area from second to third centuries A.D. The rulers of this dynasty were the followers of Brāhmaṇism but their wives were devotees of Buddhism. They constructed monasteries and temples to worship the Buddha.

The site was discovered in 1926 by A.R. Saraswati and fortunately being situated in the midst of hills and forest had escaped human spoilation. Longhurst carried out excavations from 1926 to 1931. His efforts resulted in the discovery of the great Stūpa, other small Stūpas and Vihāras as well as a palace site. This discovery included over four hundred magnificent bas-reliefs in the Amarāvati style belonging to the same period. According to V.S. Agarwala, the collection of sculptures and statues is the largest and finest ever made in southern India. The work of excavation was followed by T.N. Ramchandran from 1938 to 1940, and resumed from 1954 to 1959.

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[4] Tree and Serpent Worship, p. 223.

Vijaypuri was the well planned capital of the Ikṣavāku kings. The kings of this dynasty were at first the feudatories of the Sātavāhanas but later became independent from the time of Vasiṣṭhiputra Śri Śantimula. The numerous ruined monuments indicate that during the second-third centuries A.D., Vijaypuri was one of the largest and most important Buddhist settlements in southern India. Two types of Stūpas may be distinguished at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, viz. plain and profusely decorated. The second type is beautifully decorated with various scenes including many kinds of lotus and floral decorations. V.S. Agarwala observes, "The Nāgārjunakoṇḍa Stūpas like that at Amarāvati are remarkable for the wealth of their sculptures. The carved slabs are rich in beauty and contents."

In one scene the slab is framed on the top by a three-fold frieze consisting of a meandering lotus garland, a line of lions and a row of triratna symbols. The scene of birth and seven steps are beautifully carved on one of the slabs. Here queen Māyā Devi is standing under a blossoming Śāla tree with a female chowri-bearer on left and a sprouted water jar. The presence of jar is indicative of First Bath. A female figure is repeated on the right side with a chhatra and two chowries over head under a spreading Śāla tree. She is holding the child Gautama. Guardian Deities of the Four Quarters are holding the long cloth on which the child made seven steps. The Nativity and the Seven Steps are graphically treated in this bas-relief. In fact the Seven Steps is an ancient Vedic symbol and which was later on admitted into the Buddhist cosmology. The trees in the scene which have been identified as Śāla, M.S. Randhawa regards them Aśoka. He holds that "on account of its bunches of flowers it can easily be identified as Aśoka tree". There is no head in saying that Śāla and Aśoka both are regarded as most sacred in the Buddhist religion.

One sculptured slab shows the scene of Assault of Māra and Enlightenment. In this panel Māra is depicted on the left in an angry mood with two of his daughters baffled in their attempt to tempt the Buddha. The magestic figure of Buddha is seated in Padmāsana under the Bodhi-Tree. Another panel depicts the Buddha seated in a lotus-pose under the Bodhi-Tree. In this scene a number of divine figures are praying to him to become the universal teacher. The Bodhi-Tree is also shown in the sculpture depicting Ajātśatru's visit to the Buddha.

There is another interesting panel depicting to the conversion of Nanda, the half-brother of Buddha. This story is very well narrated by Aśvaghoṣa in Saundarānanda. By his supernatural power the Buddha took Nanda on a visit to heaven. Here the tree under which the Apsarās are shown is Aśoka tree with hanging leaves, and bunches of flowers. The Aśoka tree is again depicted in another sculpture where a maiden standing on a lion is holding the branch of a flowering Aśoka. Yellow Champā is shown on one of the reliefs with an amorous couple in front. In the words of Randhawa,[5] "It is strange how religion and erotics are juxtaposed in these sculptures, particularly when one bears in mind the puritanism of Buddhism."

V.S. Agarwala observes[6], "The sculptures from the Nāgārjunakoṇḍa Stūpas illustrate a quality of plastic art in which the perfect chiselling done by the great masters has left behind permanent records of beauty seldom obtained elsewhere."

Fall of Satvahanas

The history of Deccan after the fall of Sātvāhanas is obscure for three centuries. We get some glimpses of the Deccan from the Allāhābād inscription of Samudragupta. A number of petty states arose on the ruins of Āndhra Empire. Of these the Pallavas were prominent in the East and Rāṣṭrakuṭas on the West. In the districts of the Kanarese, a dynasty of Brāhmaṇa descent called the Kadambas enjoyed independent power from third to sixth century A.D. Their capital was Banwāsi. They again rose to some power after the fall of the Rāṣṭrakuṭas as feudatories of the Chālukyas. the power of the Kadambas continued till the middle of the fourteenth century. There was another Kadamba house ruling at Goā which was also lost in obscurity in the middle of the fourteenth century.

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[5] The Cult of Trees and Tree Worship, p. 46.

[6] Indian Art, p. 307.

It appears that the two names Pallava and Kadamba are symbolic of tree-worship in the south. Pallava means the leaves of the tree and Kadamba is a very sacred tree in Hindu mythology. S. Aiyangar holds that the Pallavas belonged to the ancient Nāga tribe. There is no doubt that the Nāga people were great worshippers of the trees. Some of the earlier kings of the Pallava dynasty were Buddhists. And we have already seen that trees occupied an important place in the Buddhist religion.

Pīpal and Neem trees are grown together in Mysore. The Pīpal is regarded as the symbol of male and Neem as the symbol of female. A ceremonial marriage of these trees is performed.

"South India has a rich tropical vegetation. This tropical luxuriance is reflected in the profusion of images which adorn the Gopurams of the temples, and in south India sculptures from thirteenth century onwards. At Halebid in Mysore the Govardhana mountain which Kṛṣṇa is supporting on his finger tips is covered with a forest of mangoes and plantains."

9

Trees in Ancient Indian Coins

Origin of Coins

Coins are important source of history. They tell us about the economic, social, political and religious life of the period in which they were issued. In the words of J. Filliozat, "Coins by their legends and figures are true historical monuments." Writing about the importance of coins Rapson observed[1]:

> "The decipherment of the inscriptions and coins and the determination of the eras in which many of them are dated, have introduced in the obscurity of early Indian history a degree of chronological order which could not have been conceived at the time when the study of Sanskrit began in Europe."

Until very late it was the popular belief that the Indians did not know the art of coinage till the time of Alexander. A. Cunningham[2] refuted this popular error by quoting the statement of Curtius that Alexander on his arrival at Taxilā was presented by the Rājā with eighty talents of coined silver.

In fact the story of coins is closely connected with the evolution of society. In the remote past the needs of the man were limited. He had not to worry much about his requirements of food, and shelter. They were met by Nature. But in course of time when the community life developed, the exchange of different products became a necessity. So the barter system came into existence. But there were few handicaps in the barter system. Hence a new method was evolved. A common commodity was fixed to serve as an intermediary in all transactions. Certain commodities got preference over others and they assumed the character of a medium of exchange. Higher value was attached to them. This was the first step towards the evolution of coinage.[3]

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[1] Cambridge History of India, pp. 55-56.

[2] Coins of Ancient India, preface.

[3] *P.L. Gupta*: Coins, p. 1.

Indus Valley

About four thousand years before the Christ, India had an evolved urban culture in the Indus valley. Among the most interesting things of this culture are seals made of paste, stone or steatite of various colours. To what use they were put it is difficult to say, but they are of much value to antiquarians. There is a view that they might have been the coins of Harappa culture. If this view is correct, trees for the first time are depicted on these coins. Tree was an important object of worship. So it was quite natural to carve them on the seals. Some trees were regarded as givers of wisdom and life. Among the seals of Mohen-jo-daro is one depicting Pīpal tree with two heads of unicorn emerging from its stem. A seal from Harappa is engraved with a weeping willow tree with hanging branches.

Vedic Period

Vedic people used their cows as the medium of transaction. In a passage in Rigveda, the price of an image of Indra is said to be ten cows. The Soma plant was in great demand amongst the Vedic Āryans ; and it was usually exchanged for cows. But this medium of cow had certain great limitations. They could not be used for the purchase of small things. "An alternate medium was necessary. The Vedic people found it in an ornament called Niṣka, which was probably some kind of necklace." It was a golden ornament. References in the Vedic literature amply show that along with the cows, the Niṣka was also the symbol of wealth. Gold could be had from the sands of many of the great rivers in India. In Rigveda, it is indirectly stated that King Divodāsa presented to his priest ten bags of gold. The discovery of precious metals carried the evolution of coinage a stage further. This much is however, certain that the stage of minting coins in India was not reached during the Vedic period. It is only Aṣṭādhyāyi of Paṇini, which gives the earliest definition of stamped metallic coins. In the words of P.L. Gupta, "If our assumptions are correct, it may reasonably be claimed that the coins originated in India at least a century before Lydia or China thought of them."[4]

From 518 B.C., when Indian Satrapy was included in the Achaemenid Empire, 360 talents in gold dust was paid annually as tribute to the great king of Persiā. But the origin of India's earliest coinage, like so much of her early history, is still shrouded in mystery. This much can be said, that in its earliest stages the coinage of India developed much on the same lines as it did on the shores of the Aegean.[5] Certain small ingots of silver, whose only mark is three circular dots represent the earliest form. Next in order are some heavy bent bars of silver with devices stamped out with a punch on one side. These two classes of coins are supposed to be circulated as early as sixth century B.C. But they have not been found in any quantity. On the other hand, from almost every ancient site in India, "punch-marked coins" have been recovered in thousands. "These are rectangular and circular flat pieces of thin silver, or more rarely copper, cut from a hammered sheet of metal and clipped to the proper weight." The punch-marked coins are of different variety. In some the obverse is occupied by a large number of symbols, and the reverse is left blank. Few coins have both obverse and reverse covered with devices. More than three hundred devices have been found on the punch-marked coins. As the tree was regarded auspicious, sacred and beneficial, so this symbol can very well be seen on these coins. These punch-marked coins bear no inscriptions.

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[4] Coins, p. 7.

Mauryan Coins

Punch-marked coins were well established in northern India during the period of the Mauryan Empire. In the times of Chandragupta and his grandson Aśoka these coins became the established currency of the whole Indian peninsula. Kauṭilya, the prime minister of Chandragupta has incidentally referred to the counterfeiters of coins in his Arthaśāstra. He has given a list of objects that were used in the manufacture of coins. The coins of this period show that they were cut and clipped to adjust them into proper weights.

The earliest die-struck coins with a device on one side only have been assigned to the end of fourth century B.C. They are chiefly found at Taxilā. Some of these coins bear a Bodhi-tree. These coins might have been issued during the reign of Aśoka, when Buddhism reached Gandhāra.

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[5] *C.J. Brown* : The Coins of India, p. 14.

Fall of Mauryas

On the break of the Maurya Empire, a large portion of north India passed into the hands of Śuṅgas. In the words of B.C. Sinha,[6] "In fact, the imperial Śuṅgas had five important centres of their rule. They were Ayodhyā, Kosam, Mathurā, Ahicchatra and Vidiśā. "The rulers of these places were the members of the imperial Śuṅga dynasty. The imperial monarch of Pātaliputra had given them rights to issue coins in their names."

The coins of Mitra kings found at Ayodhyā are known as Cock and Bull type. On the obverse of every coin we find a bull standing with the king's name in Brāhmi and on the reverse a cock is standing in front of a palm tree. Kauśāmbi coins all through bear a bull on the obverse and a tree in railing with the king's name on the reverse. The coins of Mathurā also exhibit distinctive types. Lakṣmi standing between several symbols and holding a lotus in her uplifted right hand forms the obverse type, while the reverse depicts three elephants with riders.

The Āndhra coins are small, thin pieces of irregular shape and bear neatly-punched symbols. An elephant facing left or right is the most common symbol and is found on almost all coins. Another frequently seen symbol on these coins is a conventionalised form of tree. The coinage of the Āndhra dynasty is closely connected with the currency of the north. The Āndhras probably became independent about the year 230 B.C. and their rule lasted for four-and-a-half centuries. Most Āndhra coins are either of bullion or lead with Brāhmi legends. Copper came into use for coins most likely in the time of Mauryas and the issue of silver punch-marked coins stopped sometime in the second century B.C. No silver coin is known in Uttar Pradesh and Bihār till the rise of the Guptas.[7]

Coins of Foreign Invaders

The Bactrian suzerainty over India was destroyed by the Sakas in about 135 B.C. But soon they were compelled to leave this place due to a heavy pressure of the Yueh-chi tribe. The Sakas in turn occupied the northern and north-western regions of ancient India by ending Indo-Bactrian rule. Two main lines of these Saka invaders are known from their coins. One is Maues in Punjāb and its adjoining territories and the other of Vonones in Kandhār and Baluchistān. After Spalyris the last ruler of the Vonones family, it appears that the houses of Maues and Vonones were united into one. Azes I is regarded as powerful king of the combined house. He was succeeded by Azilises. He issued an extensive series of coins of silver and copper. He introduced an Indian device of Abhishek Lakṣmi on his coins. Here the goddess Lakṣmi is standing facing a lotus flower with twin stalks and leaves; and in each leaf stands an elephant sprinkling water on the head of Lakṣmi.

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[6] History of the Śuṅga Dynasty, p. 48.

[7] *P. L. Gupta*: Coins, p. 17.

Early Coins of South and Western India

After the fall of the Mauryan Empire some silver punch-marked coins were issued in the Pāṇḍyan territory. One symbol on the coins is a leafy tree. These coins weigh 16 to 30 grains. How long these coins remained in circulation is not known to us. In the Mysore-Kanara region, rose a family which may be called Sadakana by the surname that was used by all the rulers of this family. A tree in railing and a six-arched hill is found on the reverse side of the coins. The obverse side is occupied by a standing bull with Brāhmi legends. Here for the first time the lead is used for coins. From south this metal for coinage went to Gujrāt and Malvā and thence to Punjāb.

The Sadakana family was followed by another family Ānanda. Their coins on the reverse side have a tree in railing with a few small symbols.

In the Mahārāṣṭra region rose a Kuru family. All the rulers of this dynasty issued lead coins. They bear a bow and arrow along with the legends on the obverse. The reverse side is occupied by a hilly symbol either alone or associated with a tree. The coins in Gujarāt-Saurāṣṭra region have an elephant on the side and a tree in railing on the other with few small symbols.

Coins of Gupta Rulers

Two hundred years of Gupta rule synchronises with a great revival of Hinduism. There was a renaissance in the field of art, science, literature and religion. The Gupta monarchs, as it is evident from their coins were the devotees of Viṣṇu. In the words of C. J. Brown,"...the splendid gold coinage of the Guptas with its many types and infinite varieties and its inscriptions in classical Sanskrit, now appearing on Indian coins for the first time, are the finest examples of purely Indian art of this kind we possess."[8] In the coins of Chandragupta II, Lakṣmi sits upon a lotus instead of a throne.

Post-Gupta Coins

In the post-Gupta period the earliest gold coins in Bengāl were issued by two rulers Samāchārdeva and Jayagupta. The coins of Samāchārdeva bear the symbol of Lakṣmi seated on a lotus and holding a lotus in her left hand. Lakṣmi is seen on the coins of Jaigupta; but there an elephant or lotus is seen in addition. Samāchārdeva issued another type of coins in which Lakṣmi is replaced by Saraswati, standing with a lotus in both the hands and a swan standing by her side. After a short gap in the first quarter of the seventh century, Śaśānka, the king of Gauda, issued coins with Śiva or his bull Nandi on the obverse and the goddess Lakṣmi seated on a lotus on the reverse.

Later South Indian Coins

"The numismatic history of South India, from the seventh century A.D. to about tenth century A.D., is shrouded in uncertainty."[9] The Kadambas issued few coins which bear a lotus at the central symbol. These coins were of gold. The Yadavas of Devagiri also issued punch-marked gold coins. Some of the coins are bearing a lotus also. Few Hoysal uninscribed gold coins are that which have a large caparisoned elephant on one side and a floral scroll on the other. They are mostly known from Mysore area.

Thus we see that the trees and flowers do occupy an important place in the ancient Indian coins also. It is because of the fact that the trees can be ignored nowhere. They are auspicious in various ways.

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[8] The Coins of India, pp. 40-41.

[9] *P. L. Gupta*: Coins, p. 72.

10

Epilogue

Trees occupied a very important place in the life of our primitive ancestors. Their importance has not lessened even today and they shall be full of use and utility in the future also. It is this utility of the trees which had made it one of the oldest forms of worship. Observing on serpent and tree worship Fergusson[1] comments, "My conviction, too, is that the subject will well repay any trouble that may be bestowed upon it, for if I mistake not it is the oldest —it was at one time the most prevalent, and it is now the most curious of all those forms of worship through which man ever attempted to approach or to propitiate the Divinity."

As a part of reform which Buddhism introduced in India, serpent-worship was repressed, and its sister faith of tree-worship elevated to the first rank. Fergusson believes that serpent-worship was rejected by the Buddha and his earlier followers but cropped up again among other mediaeval corruptions and we shall presently see, became an important element in Buddhist mythology.

Mahāvaṁśa describes about the despatch of a branch of the Bo-tree of Bodh-Gayā to Ceylon. It clearly shows that the tree-worship was a prevalent form during these days. In the caves of Orissa, which probably are anterior to the Christian era, we find both tree and serpent-worship prevailing. Śāñchi, Bharhuta and Amarāvati provide ample examples for tree-worship in their own days. For a history of Buddhism the paintings of Ajantā are quite important but they are not so valuable as regards tree-worship. The same remark applies to the frescoes in the caves at Bāgh and generally to the Western caves.

Speaking broadly, the modern Hindu religion may be divided into two great groups, that of Śiva and Viṣṇu. We do not see much trace of tree-worship in Śaivism. But the worship of the Tulsi plant is one of the commonest forms of Vaiṣṇavism adoration. The reverence for trees still remains deep in the hearts of the Hindus.

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[1] Tree and Serpent Worship, p. VII.

They still regard the Pīpal as a sacred tree and as a symbol of Viṣṇu. Women worship Pīpal, Baṛ and Gooler for prosperity and offsprings.

"In Beerbhoom, once a year, the whole capital repairs to a shrine in the jungle, and makes simple offerings to a ghost who dwells in a Bael tree." This shrine consists of three trees—a Bael tree, a Kachmula tree and a Saura tree. The common people claim remote antiquity for the shrine, and tradition says that the three trees that now mark the spot neither grow thicker nor increase in height, but remain the same for ever. Tree-worship is still most current in few tribes of Orissā. In the temple of a Puri district, there is a Tamala tree which is worshipped as an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa. Round the trunk of the tree a dhoti is wrapped and the garlands are placed on the branches. The tree is worshipped by women for offsprings. In Orissā, Banyan tree is a symbol of male and the Pīpal tree a symbol of female. They are ceremonially married. Unlucky husbands who loose their two wives in succession are married to a Rusā tree. After this the man is free to get himself married for the third time.

The Pīpal and Neem trees are commonly grown together in Mysore. The Pīpal is regarded as the symbol of a male and the Neem tree as the symbol of a female. Both are ceremonially married. In Rajasthan, the Neem tree is regarded as a male. Women cover their faces on the sight of this tree. In some villages of Punjab, sacred groves are still preserved. Nobody is allowed to cut the trees except for cremating the corpse.

The Deodār is held sacred in Western Himālaya. Pieces of iron are offered to the deity of this tree. This tree is supposed to have the healing power for men and cattle.

The Tariaparabok clan regard the toddy palm as their god. The origin of this legend is as follows, "A man and his wife had no children. One day the man brought home a toddy fruit to his wife and forced her to eat. She became pregnant as a result and a child was born. Since that day they never cut the toddy palm or drink its juice. It is their god."[2]

The Siris is regarded sacred among trees. The leaves of Siris and mango are hung over the door of the birth chamber of a male child.

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[2] The Cult of Trees and Tree Worship, p. 62.

There is no doubt with regard to the worship of trees in modern times and numerous instances might be adduced if necessary. The Bo-tree is worshipped now as it was in the days of Aśoka. The tree at Anurādhāpur is the principal object of worship in Ceylon at the present day. All over India there are numerous examples of tree-worship.

Verrier Elwin describes the origin of Dumariā clan from Dumar (Gooler Tree). "A man and his wife had no child. The husband used to sigh and say, if only we had a child ! One day, as he was wandering sad and disappointed through the forest, he sat down to rest under a Gooler tree. When he saw the figs hanging many and ripe above him he thought, 'If only my wife was like this tree, what happiness we would have'. Now in this tree was a hole about the height of a man's waist above the ground. The man went to the tree in this hole. In due time a human child was born from one of the figs and he was the father of the Dumariā clan." The Semribod tribe regard the silk cotton tree as sacred. The Jand tree is worshipped by the people in Punjab and Rajasthan. In west Punjab, the Jand is worshipped by women for children.

To speak at length of the Palm tree would require a volume. So much does man owe to this tree in the east that the inhabitants of those countries where it flourishes cannot think of a land possessing any attraction where it does not exist. An Arab lady felt sorry to learn that England produces no palm trees.

Indian art from the earliest times has been closely associated with religion. As such the auspicious symbols as part of religious thought and ritualistic signs penetrated all walks of society. Some of the symbols have survived through the ages up to our own times. Among the different types of symbols, floral designs and patterns occupied an important place. In Indian art and religion the importance of Kalpavrikṣa, Kalpalatā, Padma, Pīpal, Vaṭa, Muchakunda, Palm, various trees of the Buddha and trees and plants in general can never be exaggerated. Assimilation of these symbols in Indian art and religion tells us much about the tree-worship in ancient India. Alakā had the ideal garden of Kubera and the other elements of Kailāśa, and Mānsarovara, and above all the Kalpavrikṣas from which the Yakṣas and Yakṣaṇis obtained all their desires. In fact this was a link with the older Mithuna cult.

No words can express the importance of trees and plants in human life. As such India has been most forward in showing greatest respect to them. In our good ancient days when we respected a thing too much divinity was granted to it. It was with the sole object of the preservation of trees that Vana-Mahotsava was launched in 1950. Now-a-days the people in the forest areas have started chipko movement. They do not want that their trees should be cut down. Trees have always been among the chief divinities of India. It is a tradition which will continue to inspire our future generations for ages to come.

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List of Coins

PUNCH-MARKED COINS

1. *Kośala*: (Early type). Silver. Obverse. Among many symbols two leaves placed opposite to each other.
2. *Kāśi*: Silver. Obverse. Two pairs of two symbols placed alternately. One is composed of a whorl and another appears lotus like.
3. *Āndhra*: Silver. Obverse. Among many symbols, there is a conventional tree.
4. *Magadha*: (Imperial; early type). Silver. Obverse. Among five symbols, there is a branch of tree.
5. *Magadha*: (Imperial type). Silver. Obverse. Among five symbols, there is a long tree.
6. *Magadha*: (Imperial type). Silver. Obverse. Among five symbols, there is a tree.

POST-MAURYAN LOCAL COINS OF NORTH INDIA

7. *Taxilā*: Copper. Obverse. Among two symbols, there is a tree in railing.
8. *Taxilā*: Copper. Obverse. Among four symbols, there is a tree in railing.
9. *Kauśāmbi*: Copper. Reverse. Among many symbols, there is a tree in railing.
10. *Eran*: Copper. Obverse. Among four symbols, there is a tree in railing.
11. *Ujjain*: Copper. Obverse. To the left of the deity, there is a tree in railing.
12. *Hiraṇyāśrama*: Copper. Reverse. There is a palm tree on the right corner.

13. *Uddehika*: Copper. Obverse. Tree in railing placed horizontally over the bull. Reverse. Among three symbols, there is a tree in railing.
14. *Ayodhyā*: King Haridatta. Copper. Obverse. A tree in railing can be seen.
15. *Ayodhyā*: King Sivapalita. Copper. Obverse. A tree in railing can be seen.
16. *Ayodhyā*: King Kumudasena. Copper. Obverse. A tree in railing can be seen.
17. *Ayodhyā*: King Satyamitra. Copper. Reverse. Swan before a palm tree.

EARLY COINS OF SOUTH INDIA

18. *Paṇḍya*: Silver. Obverse. Among five symbols there is a tree with two taurines.
19. *Āndhra*: Copper. Obverse. Tree in railing.
20. *Maharathi*: Sadakana Kalalaya. Lead. Reverse. Tree in railing.
21. *Ānanda Dynasty*: Lead. Reverse. Tree in railing.
22. *Kuru Dynasty*: Lead. Reverse. Tree in railing.
23. *Kuru Dynasty*: Lead. Reverse. Tree in railing on the left side.
24. *Kuru Dynasty*: Lead. Reverse. Four tired hill and a tree placed side by side over a railing.

GUPTA COINS

25. *Chandragupta II*: Gold. Reverse. Goddess seated on lotus, holding lotus in the left hand.
26. *Chandragupta II*: Gold. Reverse. Goddess holding a lotus in the right hand.
27. *Chandragupta II*: Gold. Reverse. Goddess holding a fillet in the right hand and lotus in her left.
28. *Chandragupta II*: Gold. Reverse. Goddess holding a lotus in her right hand.
29. *Skandagupta*: Gold. Reverse. Goddess seated on lotus, holding

a lotus in her left hand.

30. *Budhagupta*: Gold. Reverse. Goddess seated on a lotus, holding lotus in her left hand.
31. *Narsinghagupta*: Gold. Reverse. Goddess seated on a lotus, holding lotus in her left hand.
32. *Prakāśāditya*: Gold. Reverse. Goddess seated on lotus, holding lotus in her left hand.

POST-GUPTA COIN OF BENGAL

33. *Śaśāṅka*: Gold. Reverse. Goddess seated facing on lotus.

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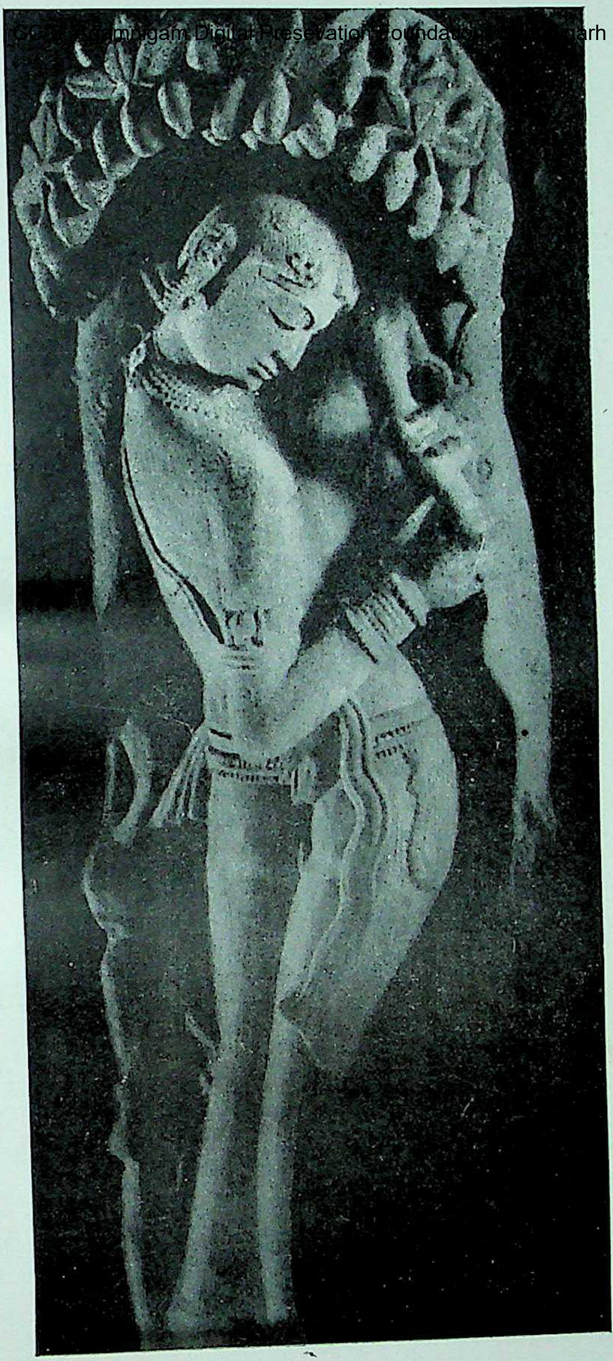


Plate 1. Bracket figure under a Mango Tree,
Lakṣamaṇa Temple, Khajuraho.

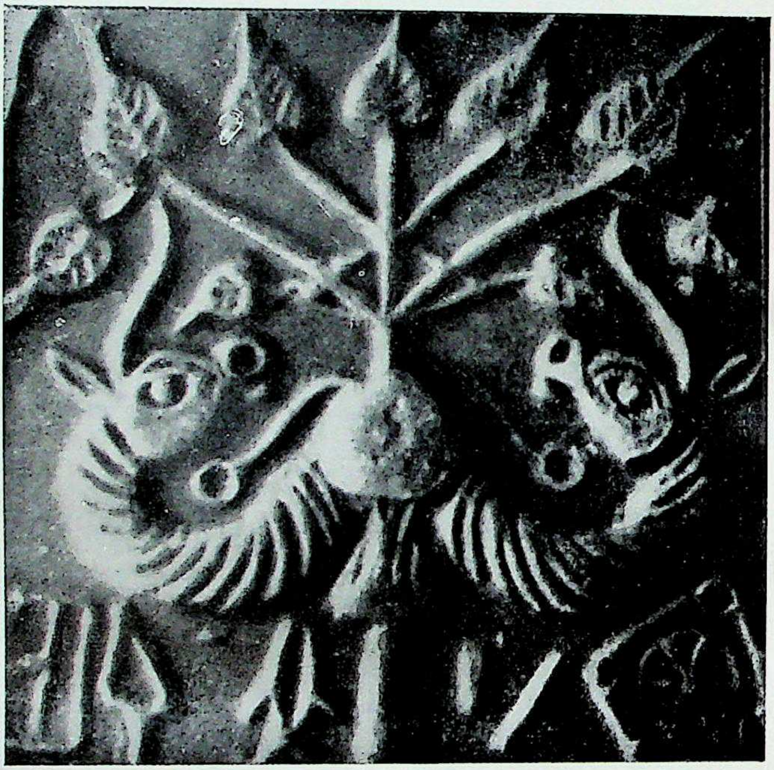


Plate 2. Mohen-jo-daro Seal showing a stylised Pīpal Tree.

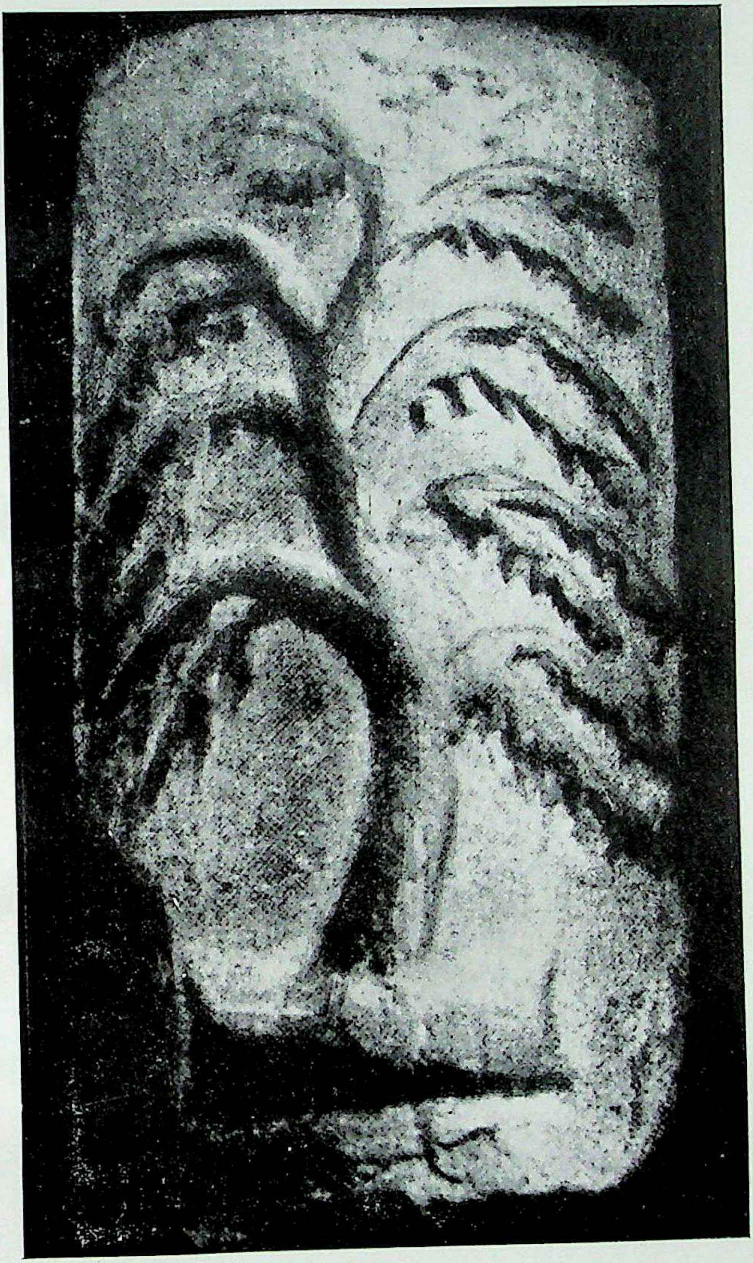


Plate 3. Harappa Seal showing a weeping willow tree.

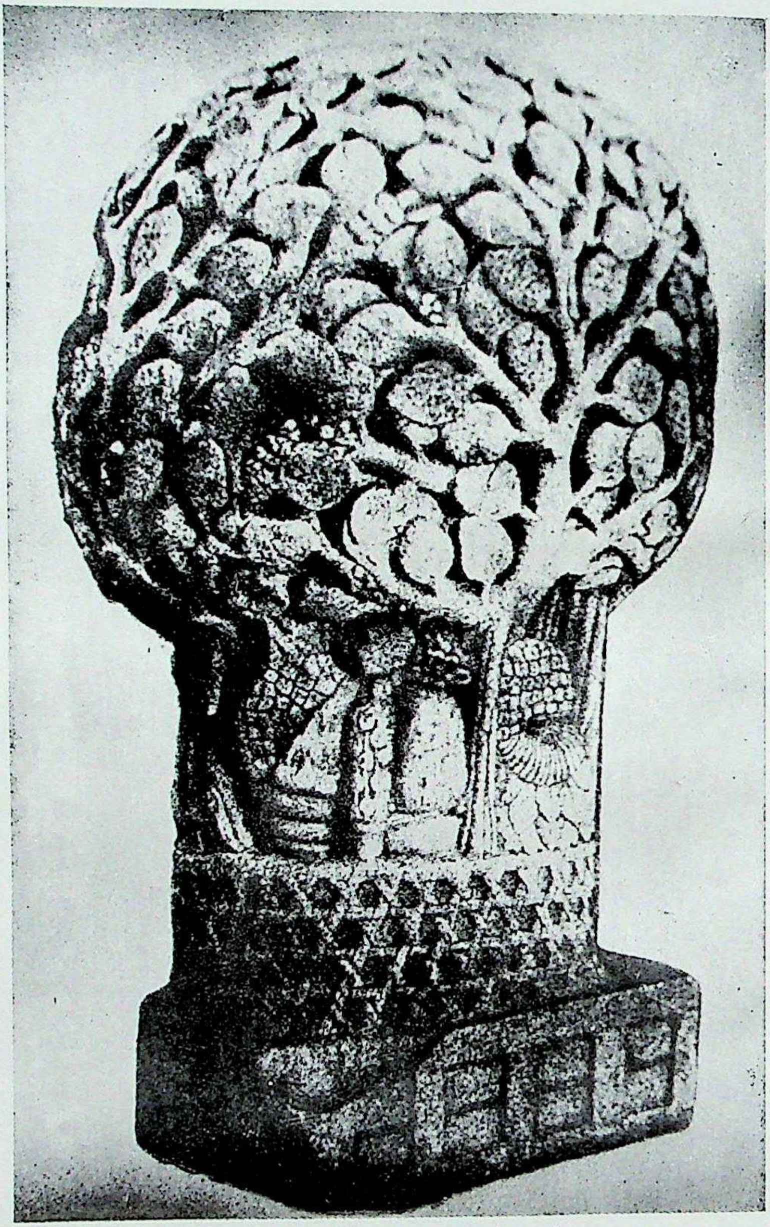


Plate 4. Besnagar Kalpa-vrikṣa of third century B.C.

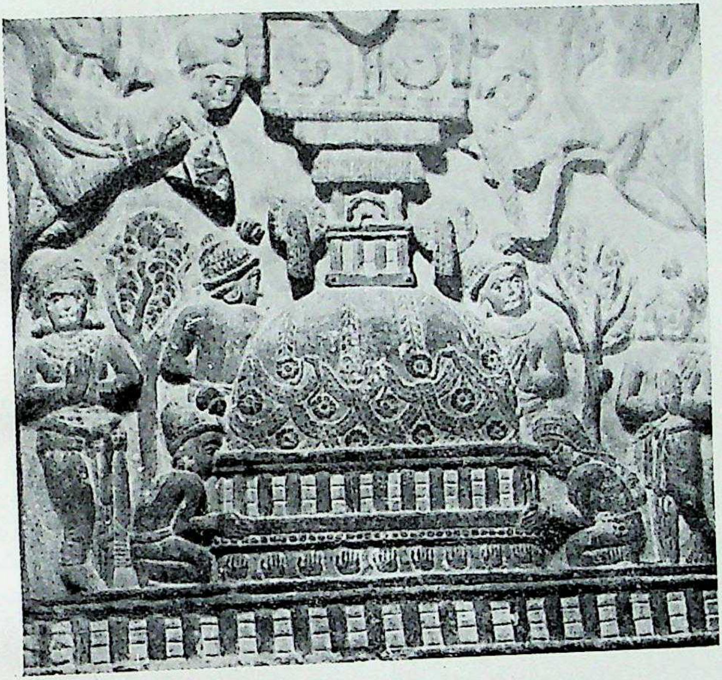


Plate 5. The worship of a Stūpa by earthly and aerial beings. Relief from a fence rail, Bharhuta.

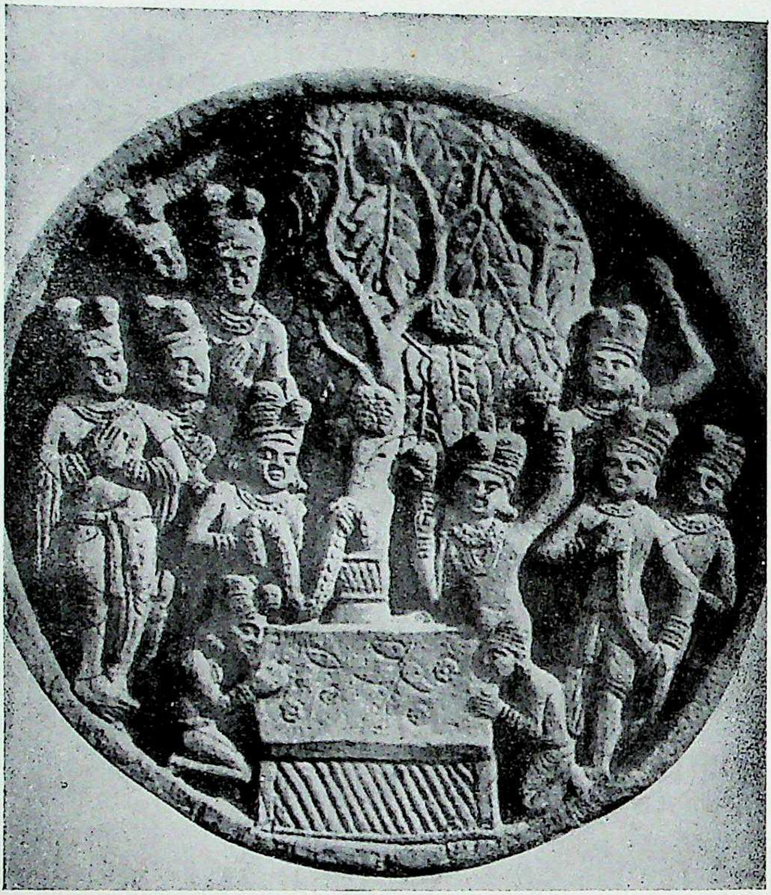


Plate 6. The worship of a sacred tree, Bharhuta.

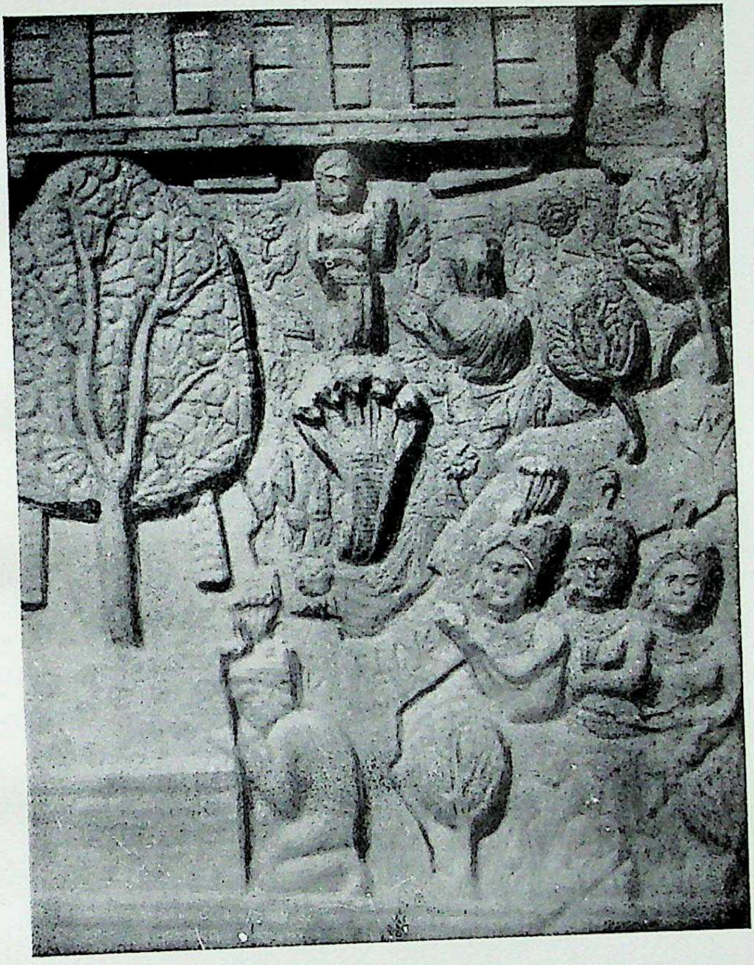


Plate 7. Nāgarāja worships the Buddha, Bharhuta.

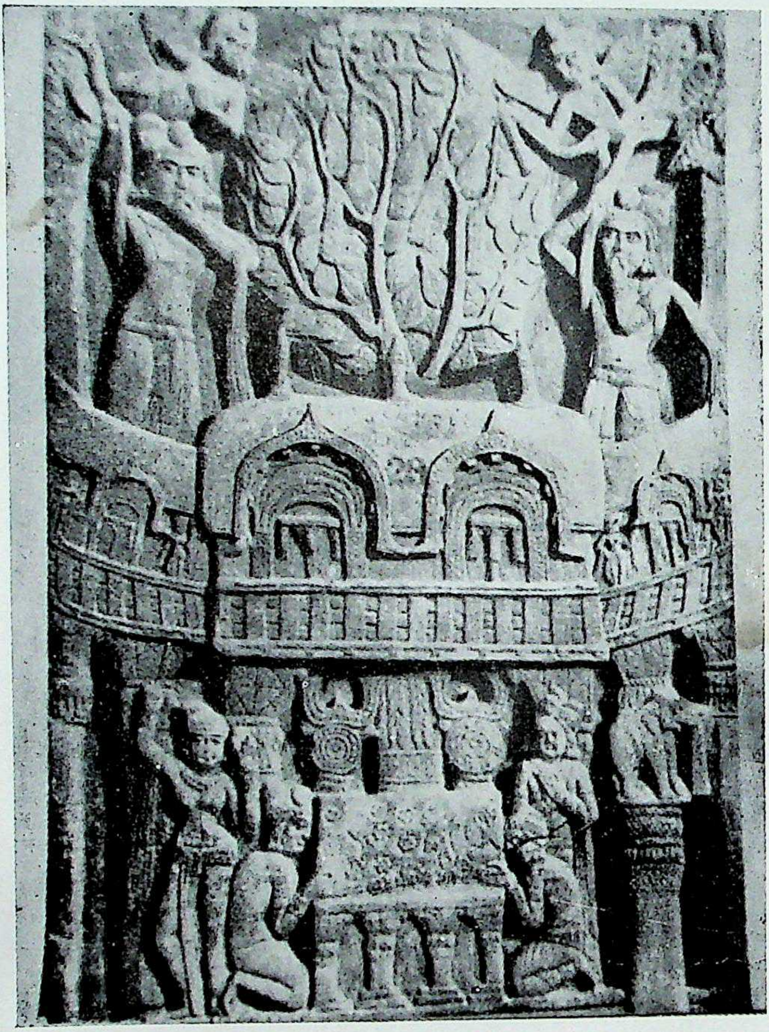


Plate 8. Prasenjit pillar—worship of Bodhi Tree, Bharhuta.

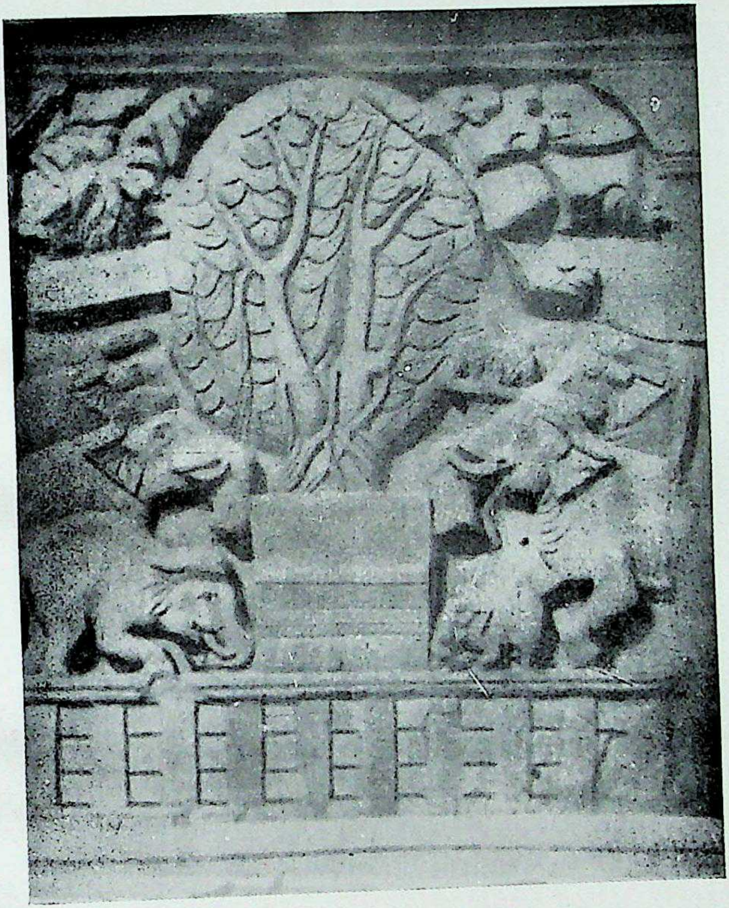


Plate 9. Worship of sacred Vata Tree, Bharhuta.

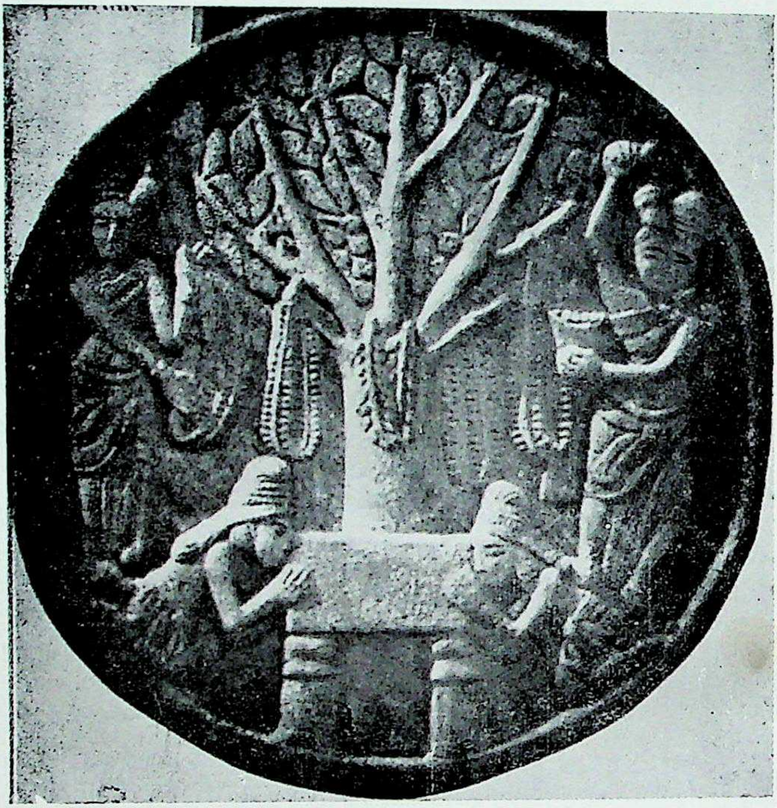


Plate 10. Worship of sacred Gooler Tree, Bharhuta

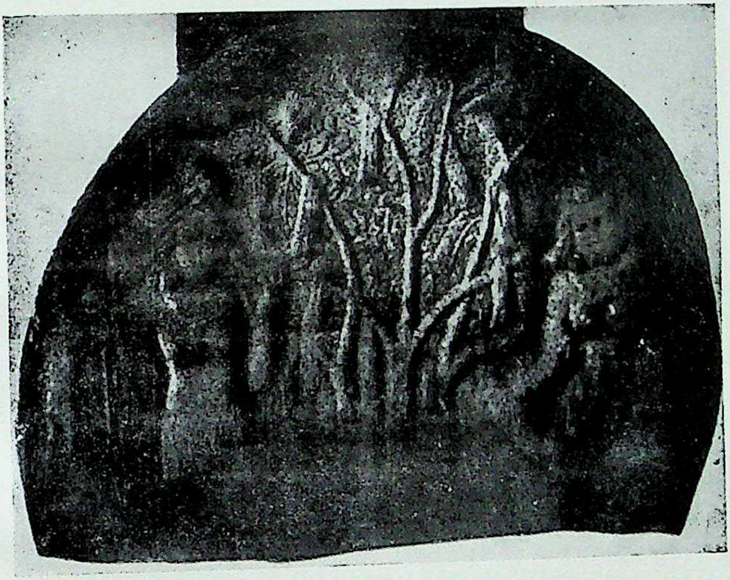


Plate 11. Sacred Sirisa Tree, Bharhuta.

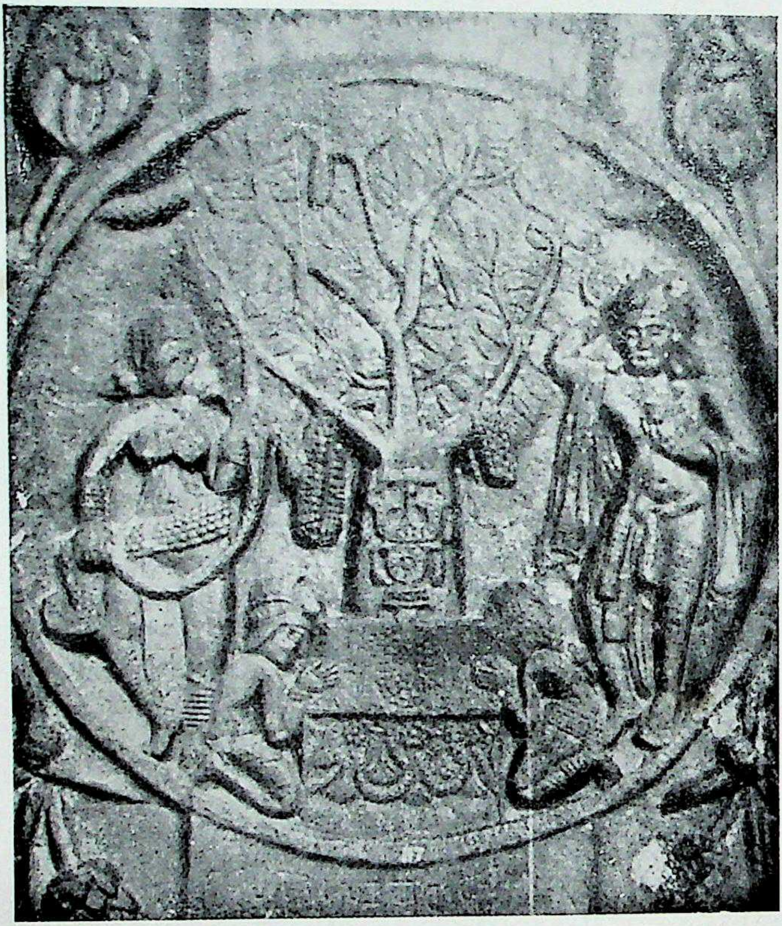


Plate 12. Worship of sacred Śála Tree, Bharhuta.

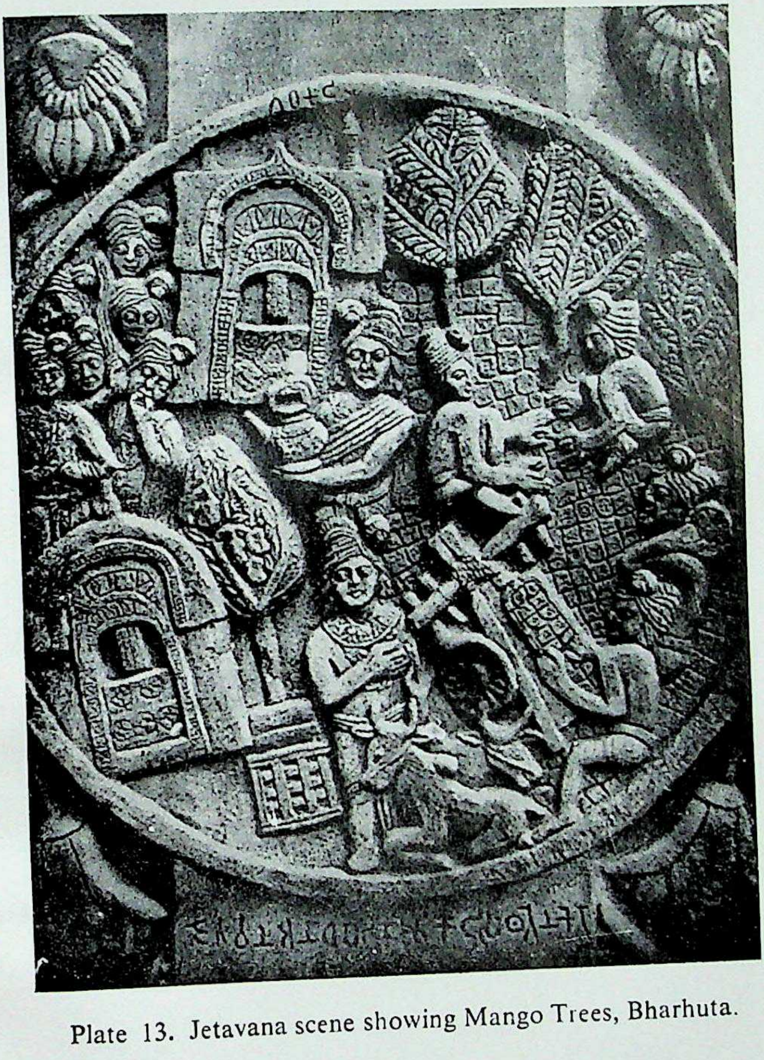


Plate 13. Jetavana scene showing Mango Trees, Bharhuta.

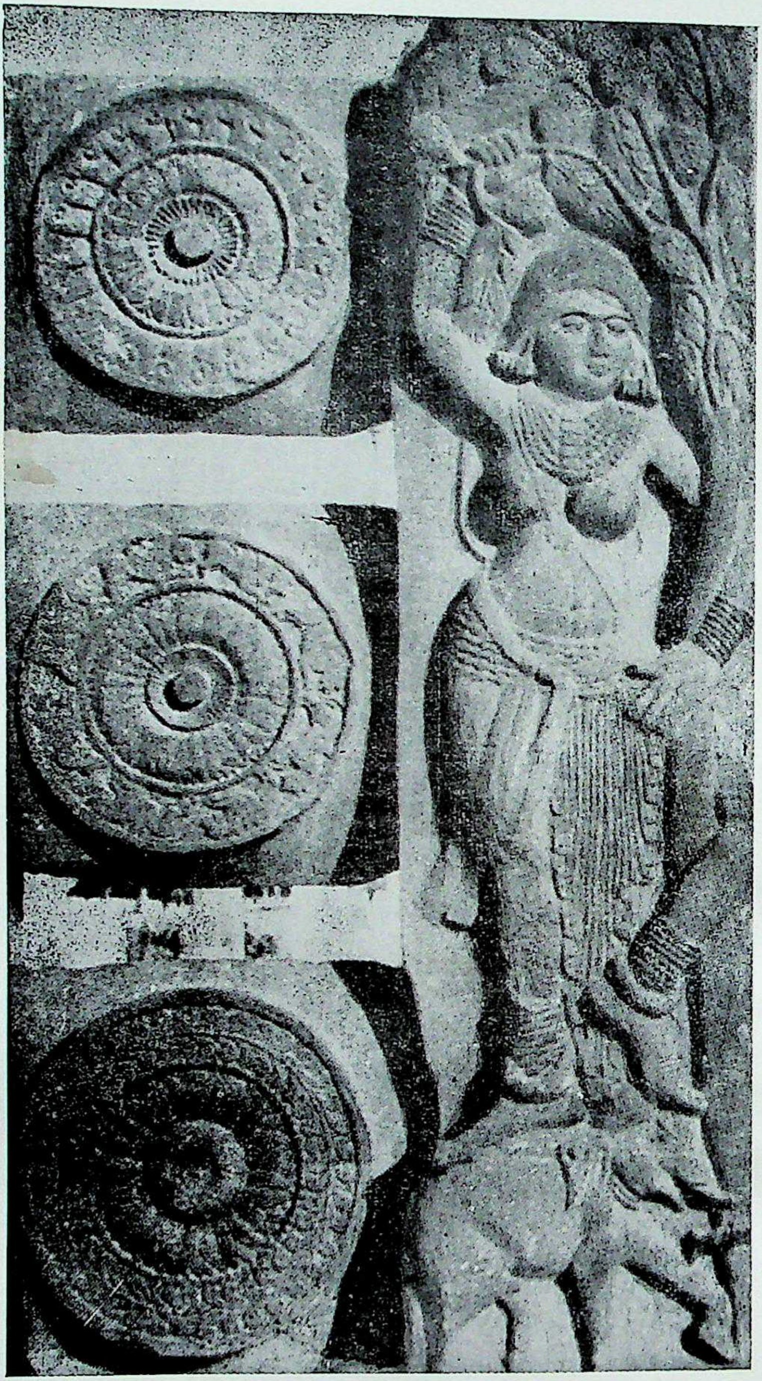


Plate 14. Chulakoka Yakṣaṇi holding a branch of Aśoka Tree.

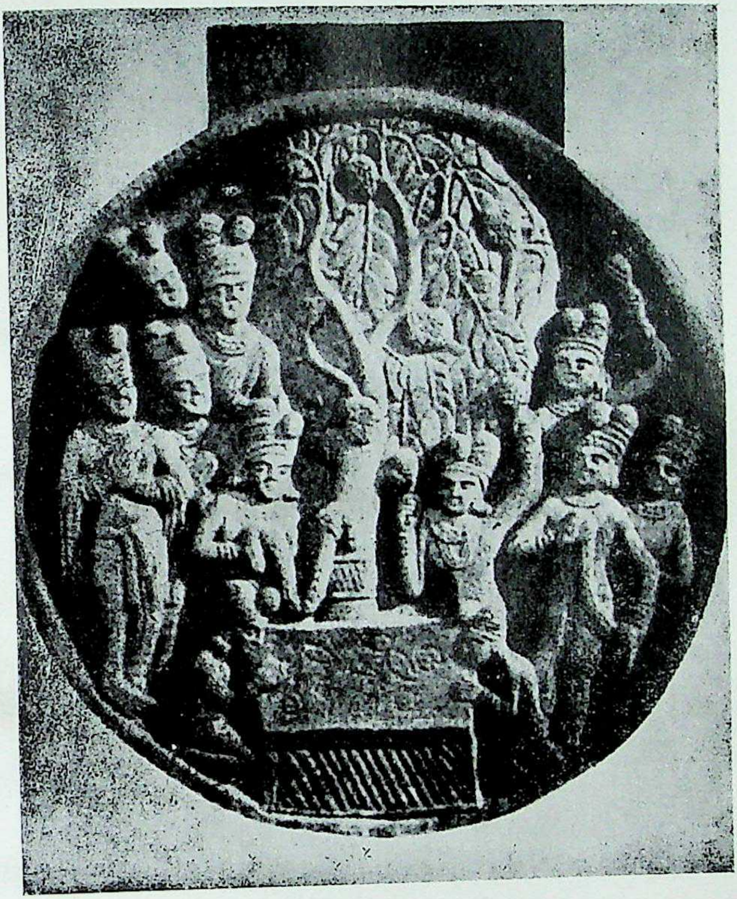


Plate 15. Worship of Patali Tree, Bharhuta.

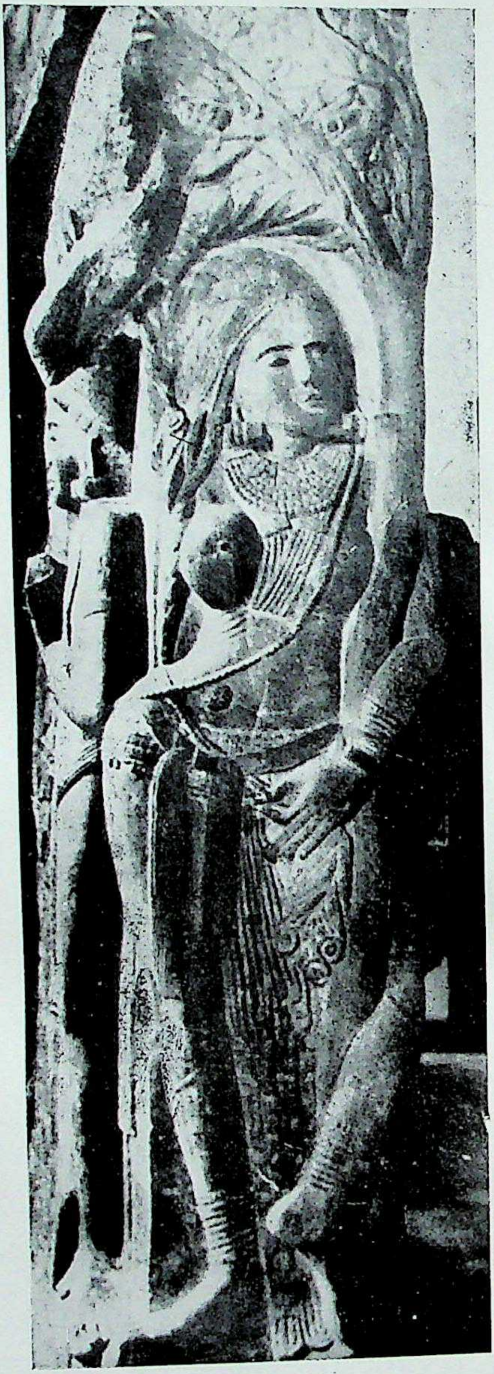


Plate 16. Chanda Yakṣaṇi with Nāg-Kesara Tree, Bharhuta.

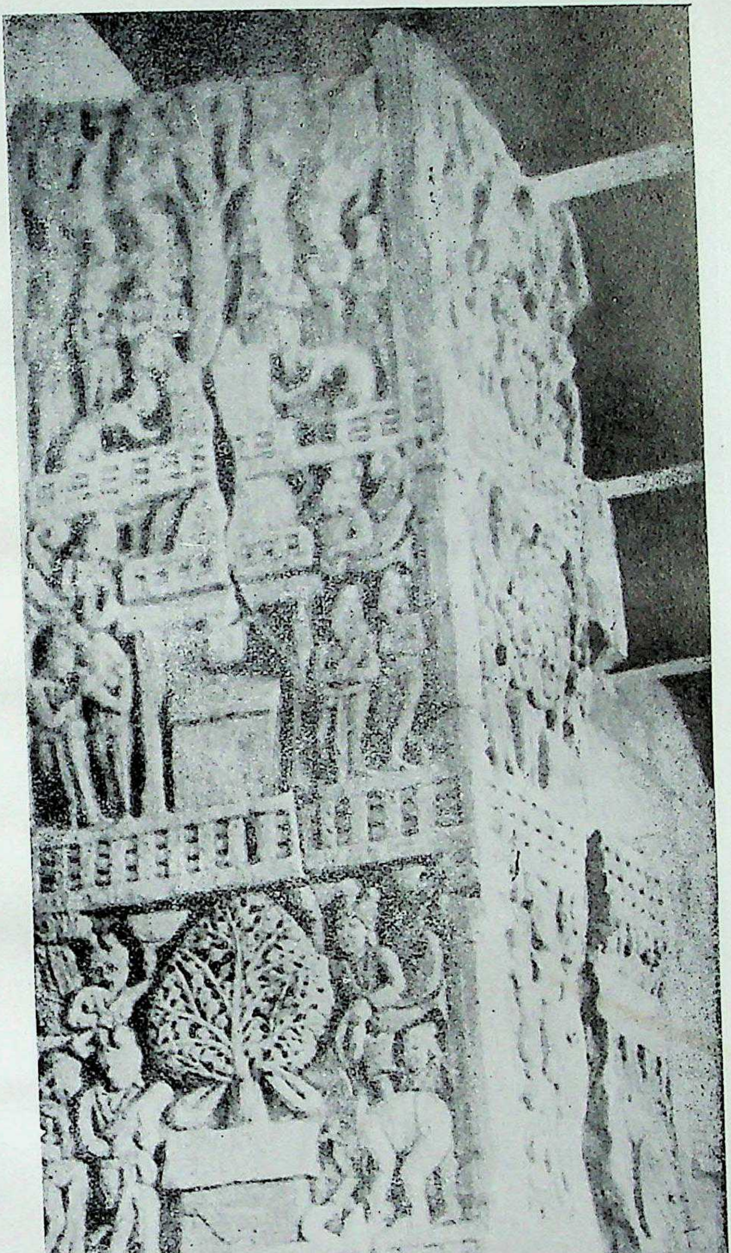


Plate 17. Worship of a Pīpal Tree, Sāñchi.

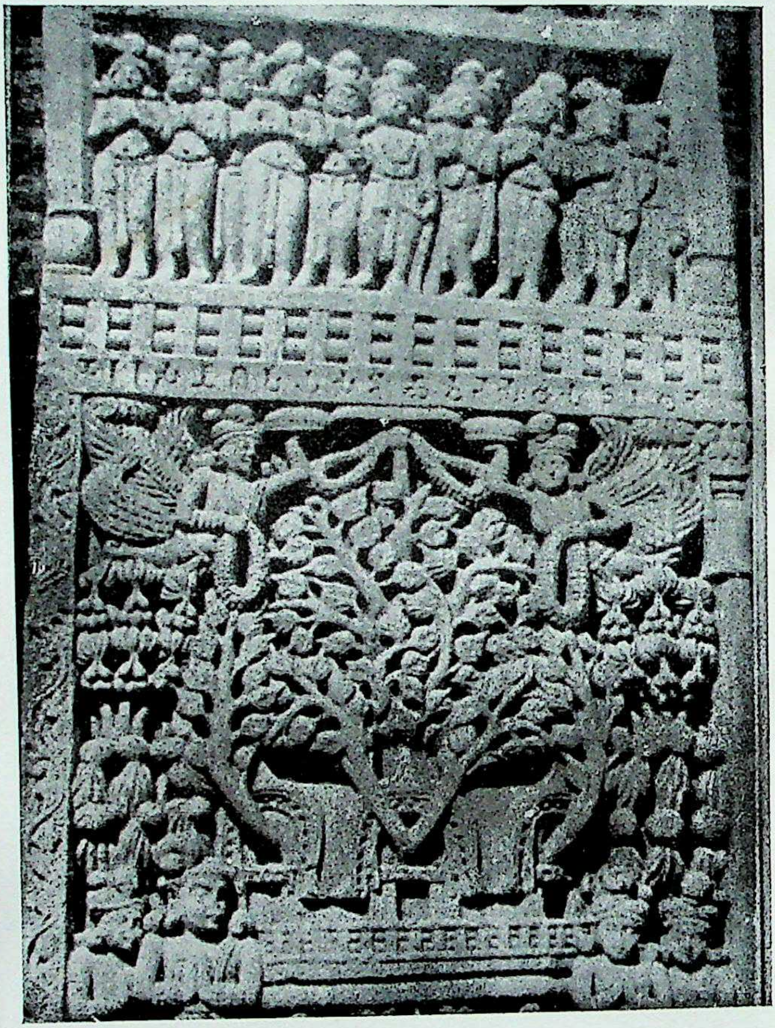


Plate 18. Worship of a Pīpal Tree, Sāñchi.

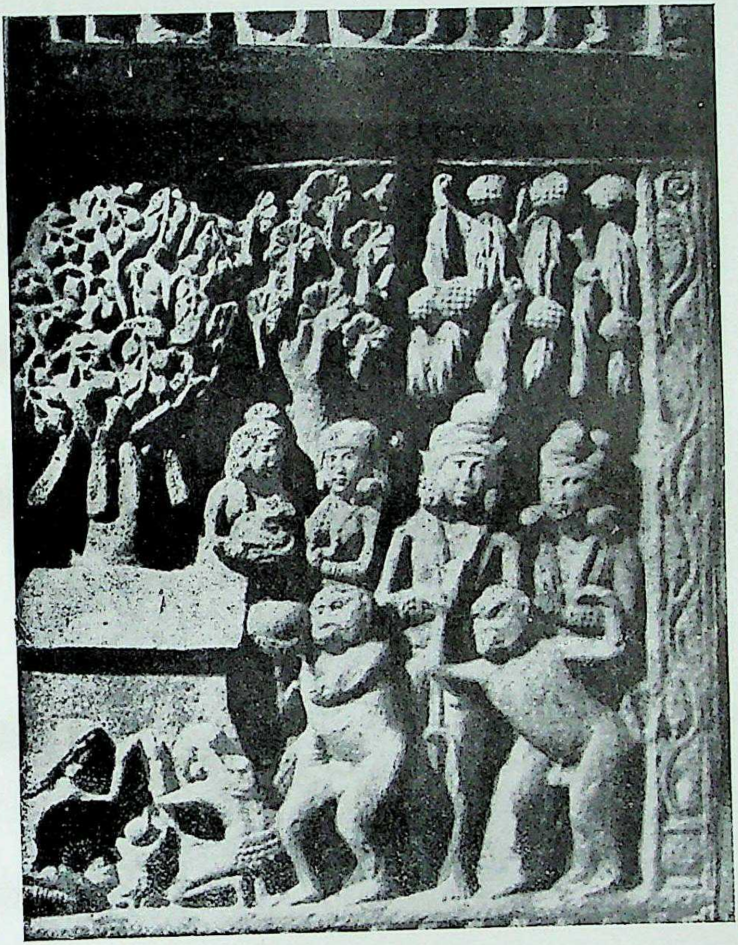


Plate 19. Monkeys at Vaiśāli offering honey to the sacred tree, Sāñchi.

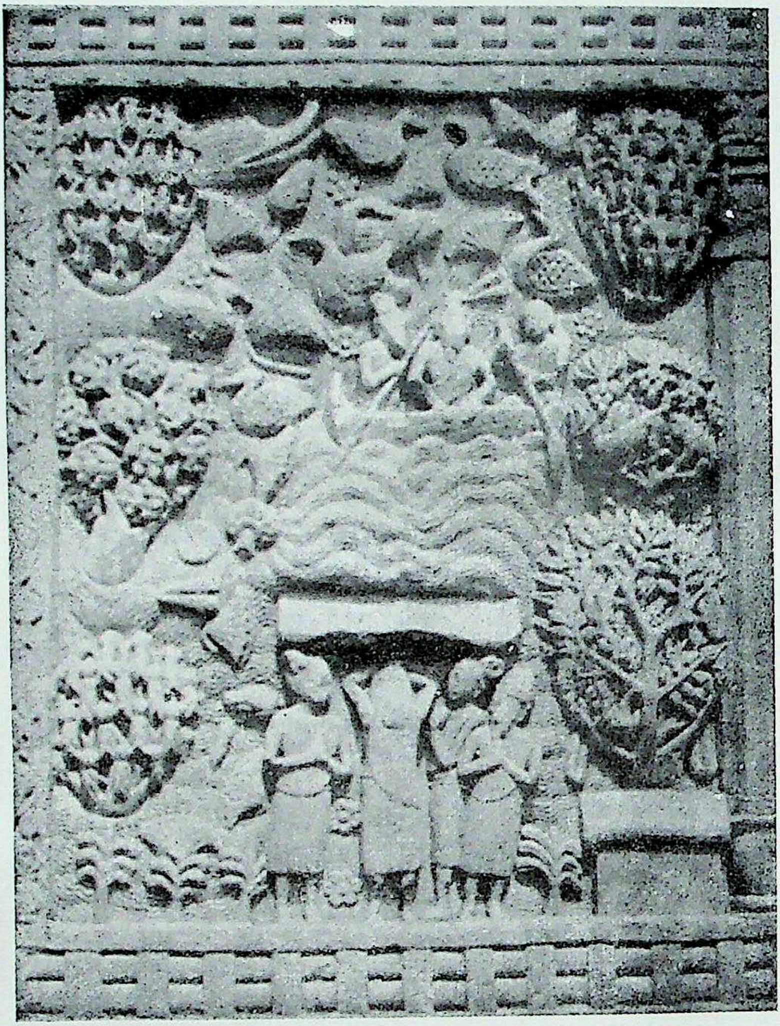


Plate 20. Miracle of walking over water. Many sacred trees and plants have been shown, Sāñchi.

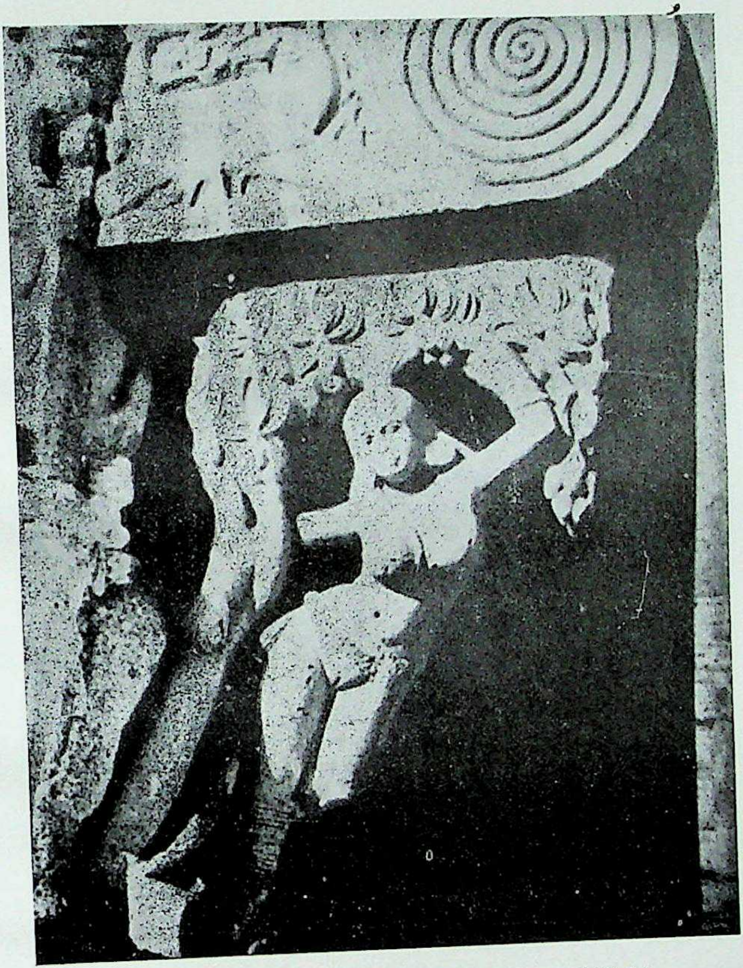


Plate 21. Yakṣaṇi under Mango Tree, Sāñchi.

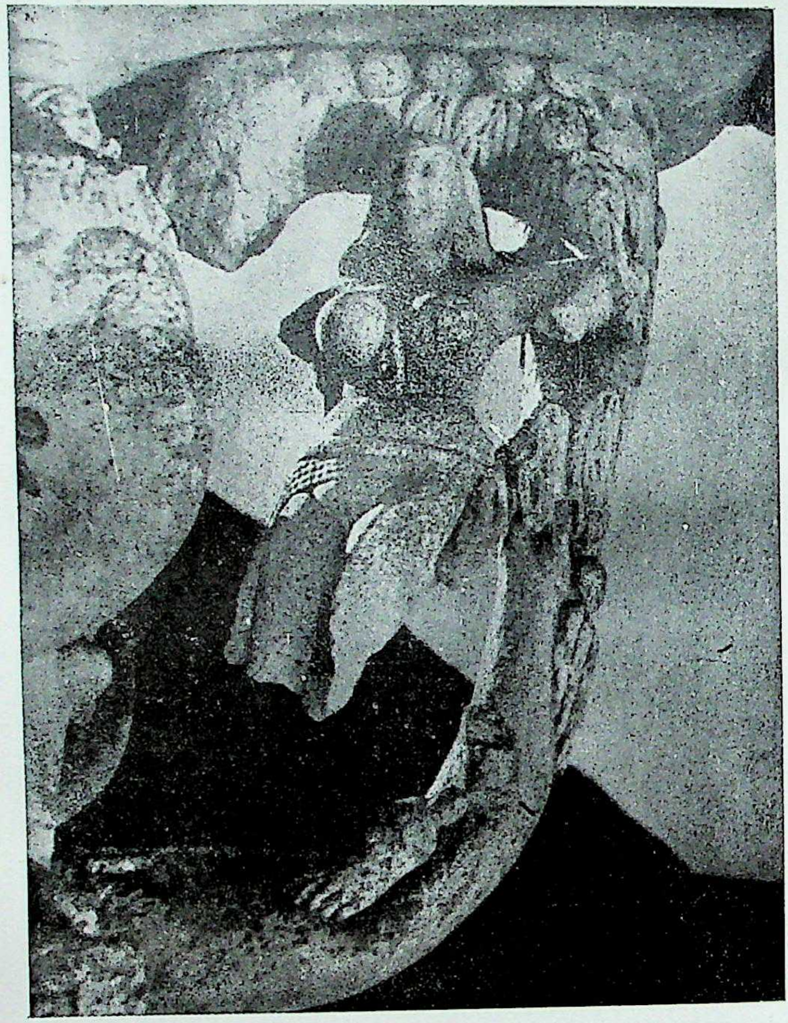


Plate 22. Yakṣaṇi under Aśoka Tree, Sāñchi.

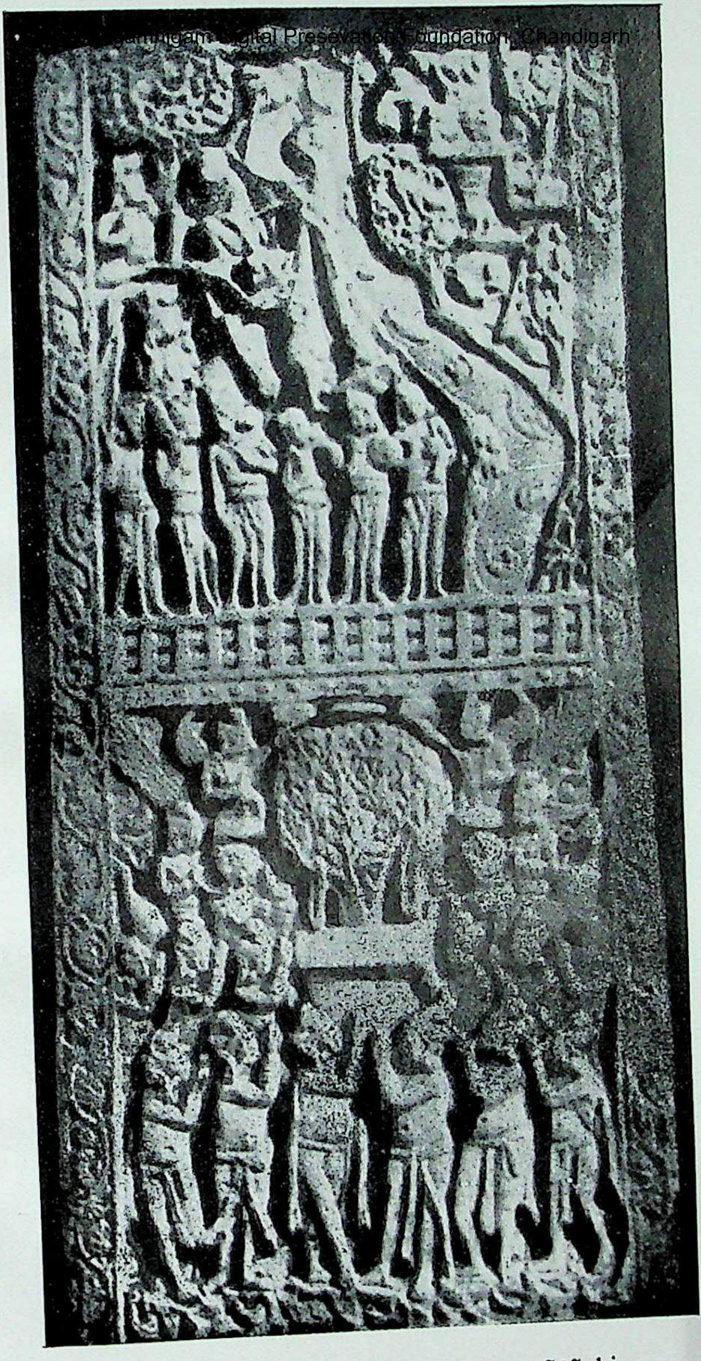


Plate 23. Worship of a Bodhi Tree, Sāñchi.

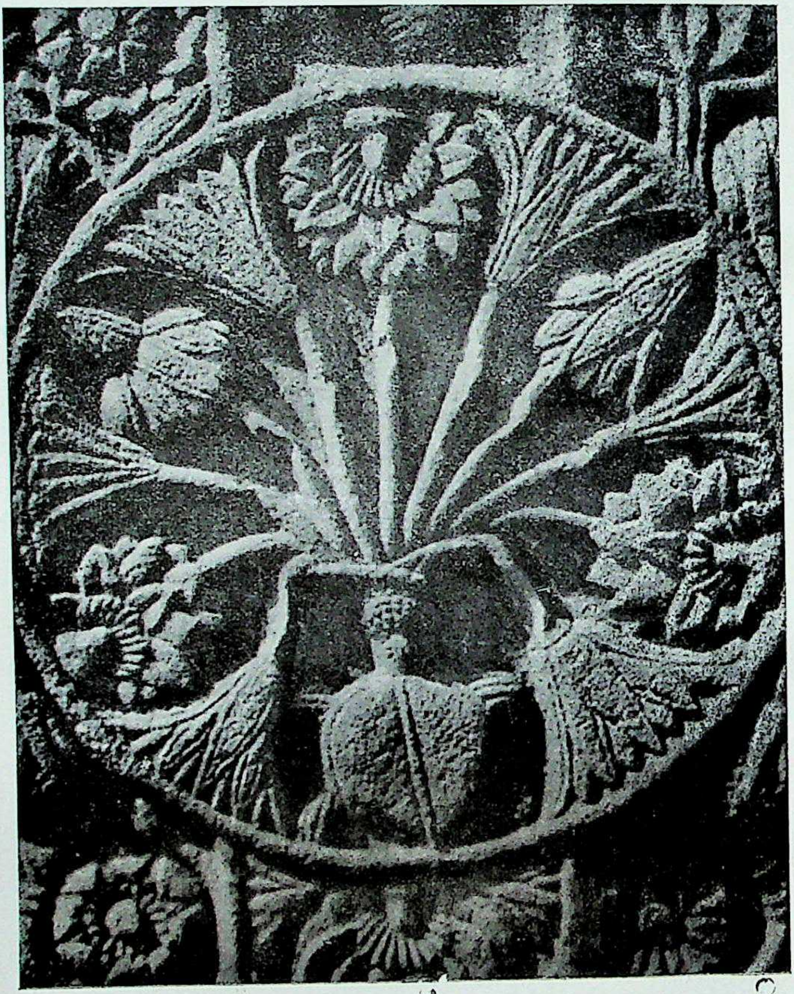


Plate 24. Tortoise with a lotus stalk in its mouth, Sāñchi.

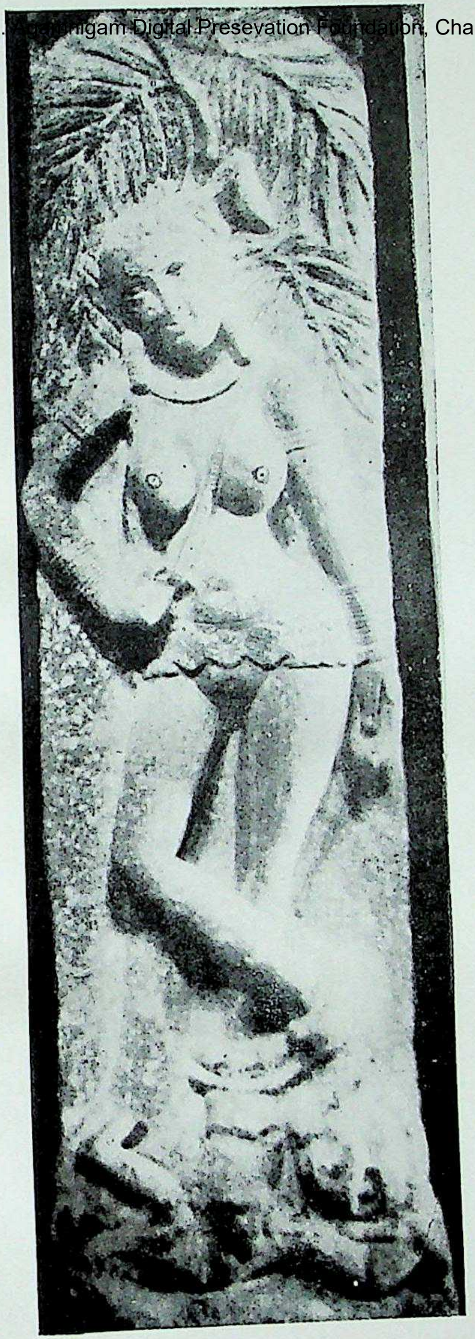


Plate 25. Woman under an Aśoka Tree, Kuṣāṇa, Mathurā.

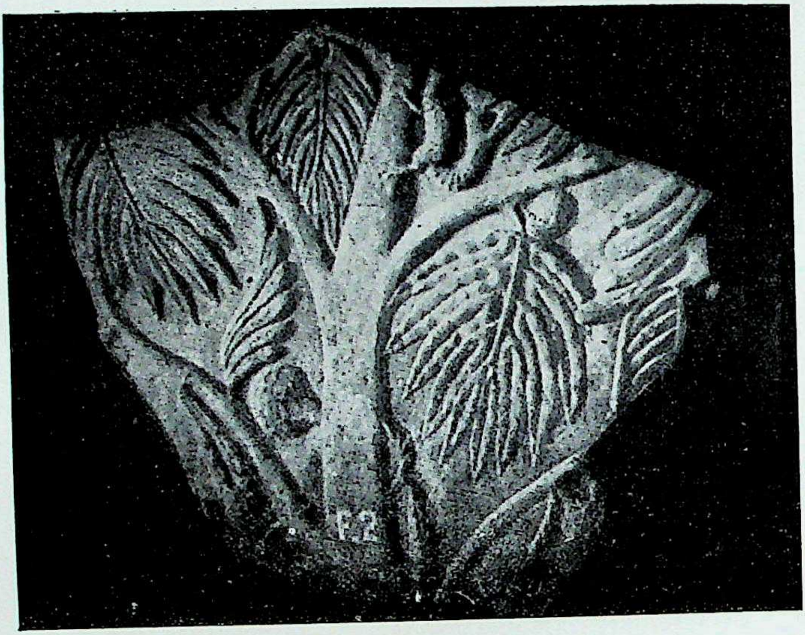


Plate 26. Aśoka Tree, Kuṣāṇa, Mathurā.

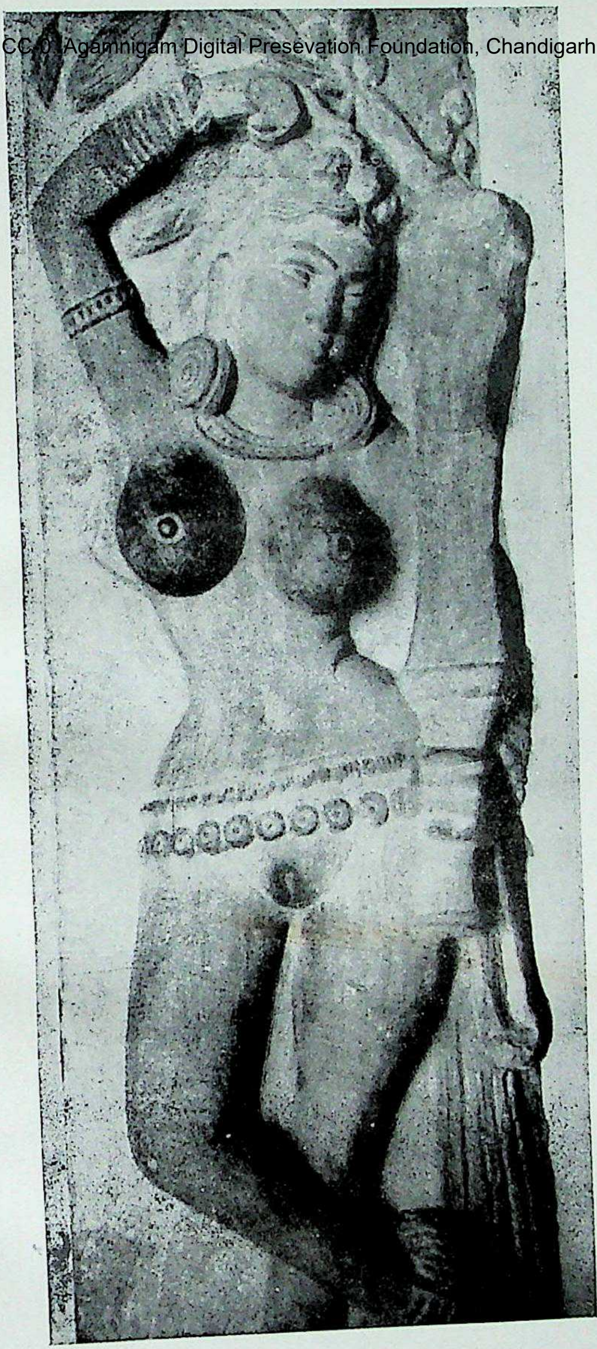


Plate 27. Woman under a Kadam Tree,
Kuṣāṇa, Mathurā.

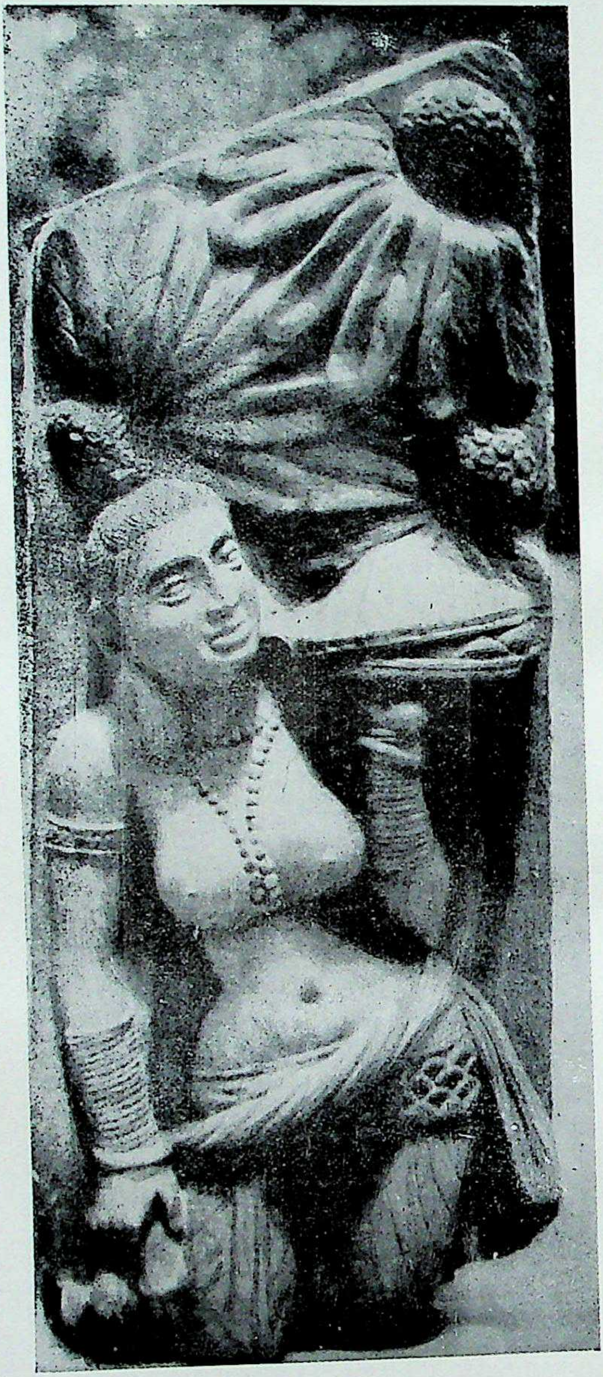


Plate 28. Woman under a Champā Tree, Kuṣāṇa, Mathurā.

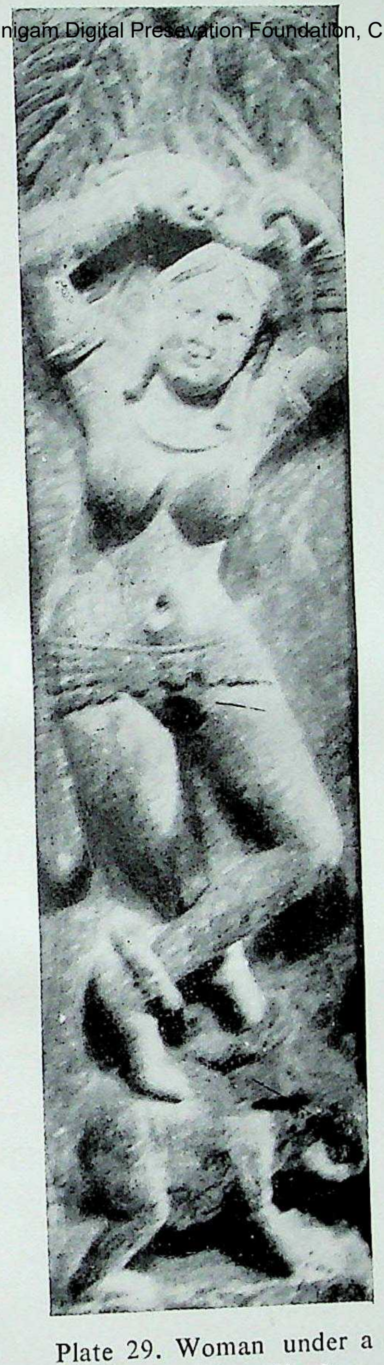


Plate 29. Woman under a Nāg-Kesara Tree, Kuṣāṇa, Mathurā.

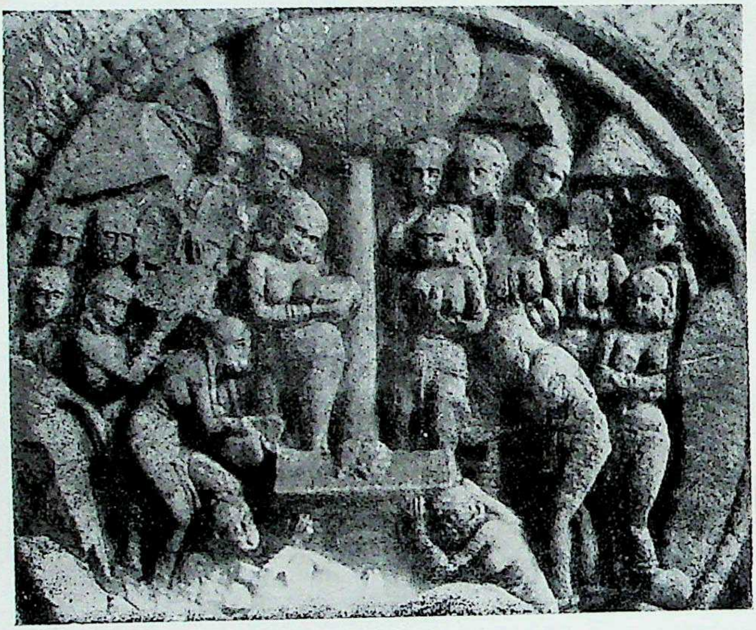


Plate 30. An Indian village with its sacred tree,
Amarāvati.

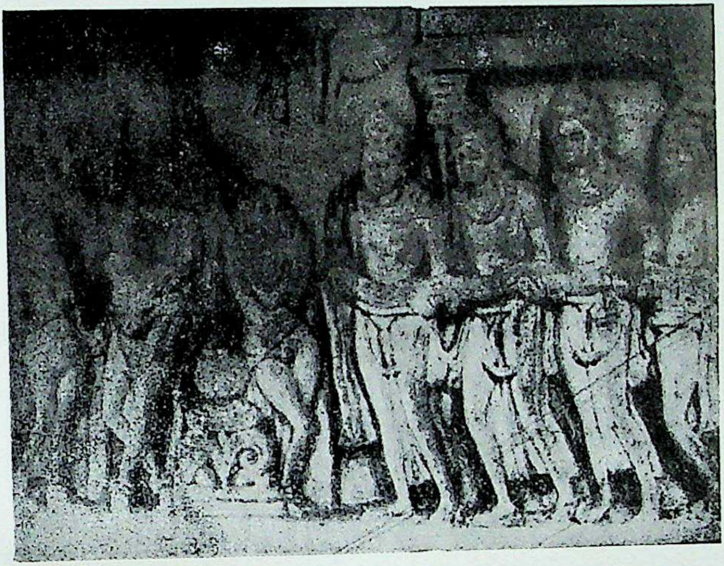


Plate 31. Birth of Buddha under an Aśoka Tree,
Nāgarjunakonda.

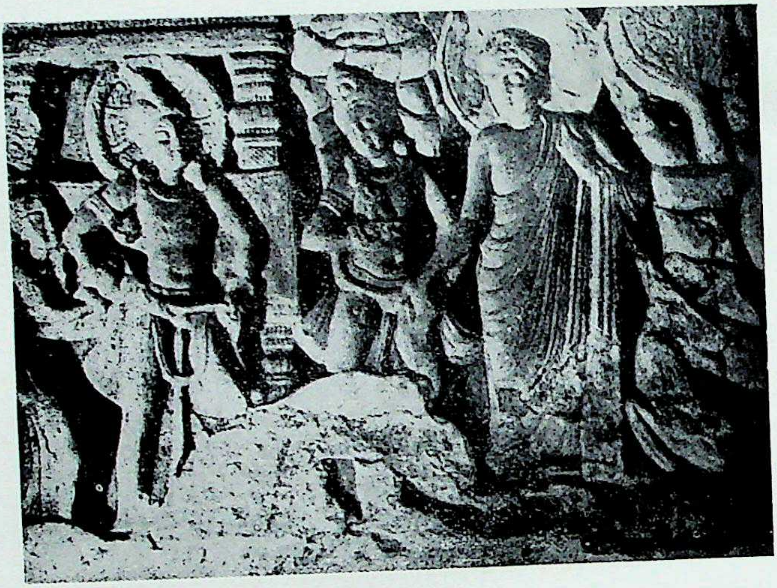


Plate 32. Ajātaśatru's visit to Buddha, Pīpal Tree in the background, Nāgarjunakonda.

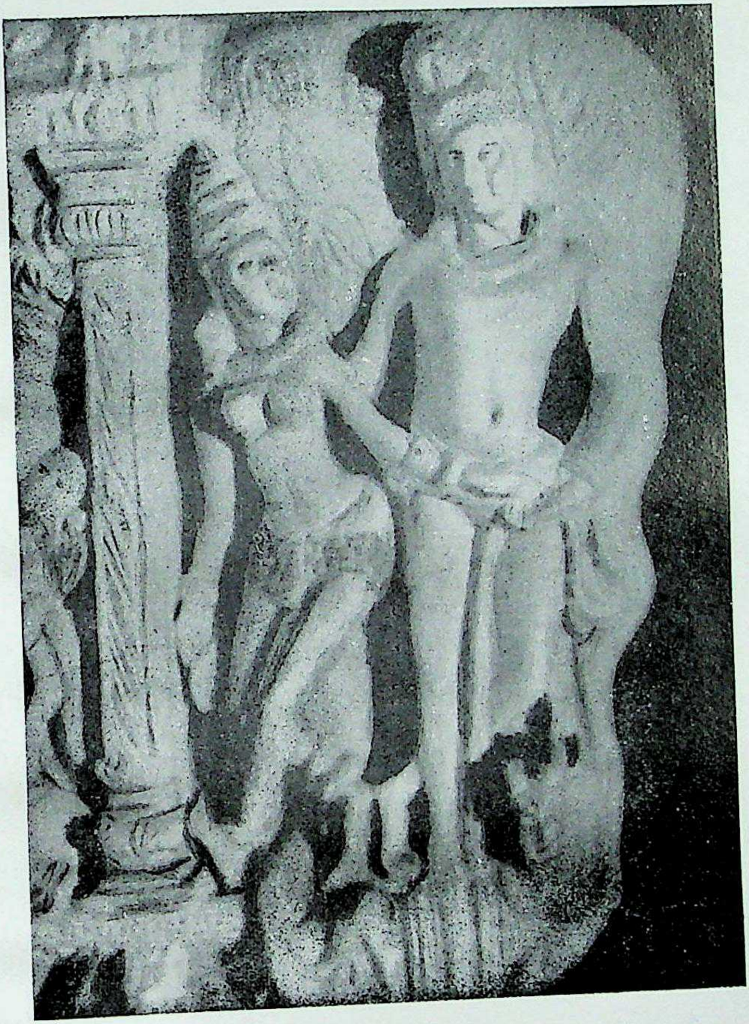


Plate 33. An amorous couple, Champā Tree in the background.

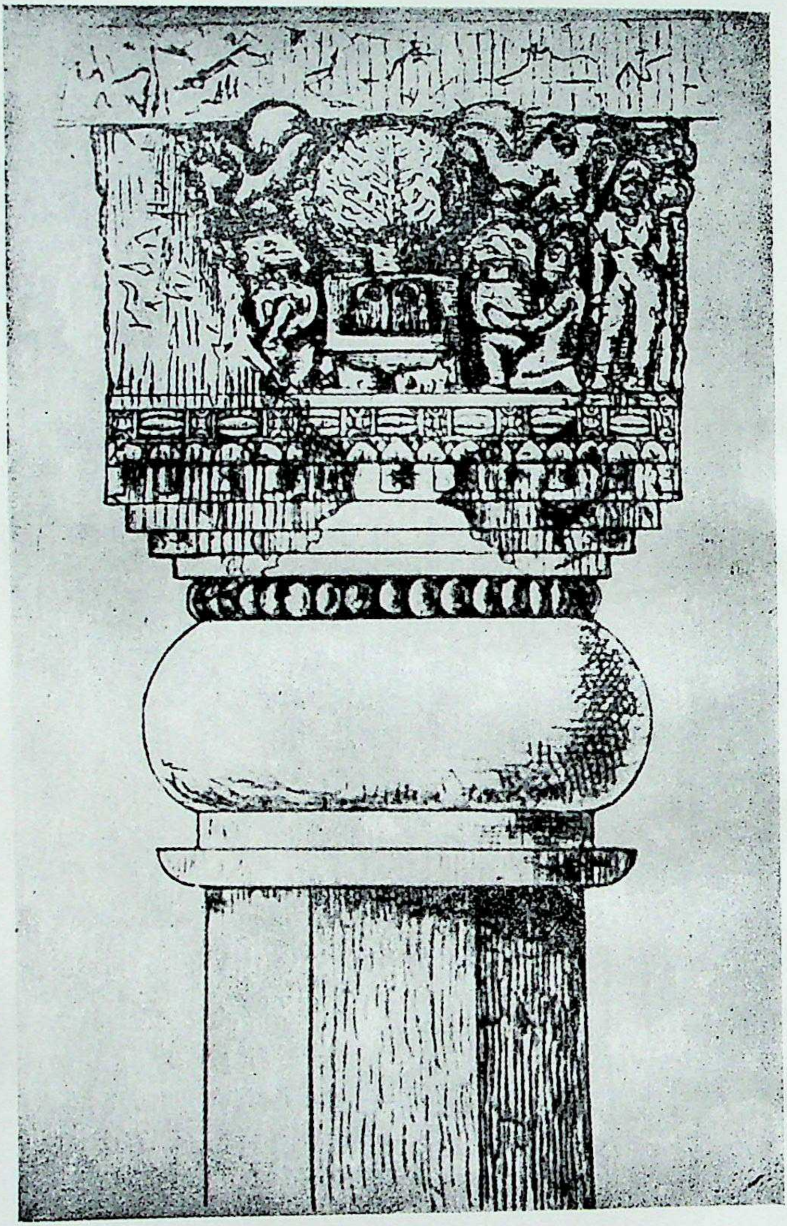


Plate 34. Early worship of Bodhi Tree and Buddha's footprints, Kānheri cave.

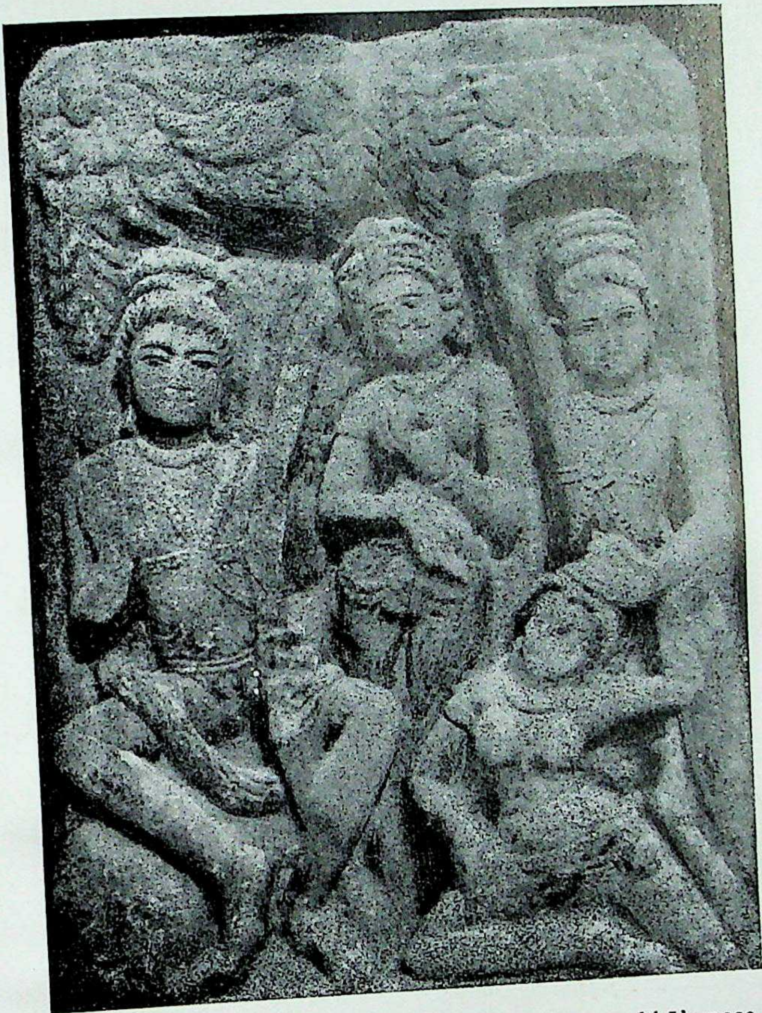


Plate 35. A scene from the Rāmāyaṇa. Sūrpaṇakhā's nose being cut by Lakṣamaṇa. Flowering Aśoka on the top, Deogarh.

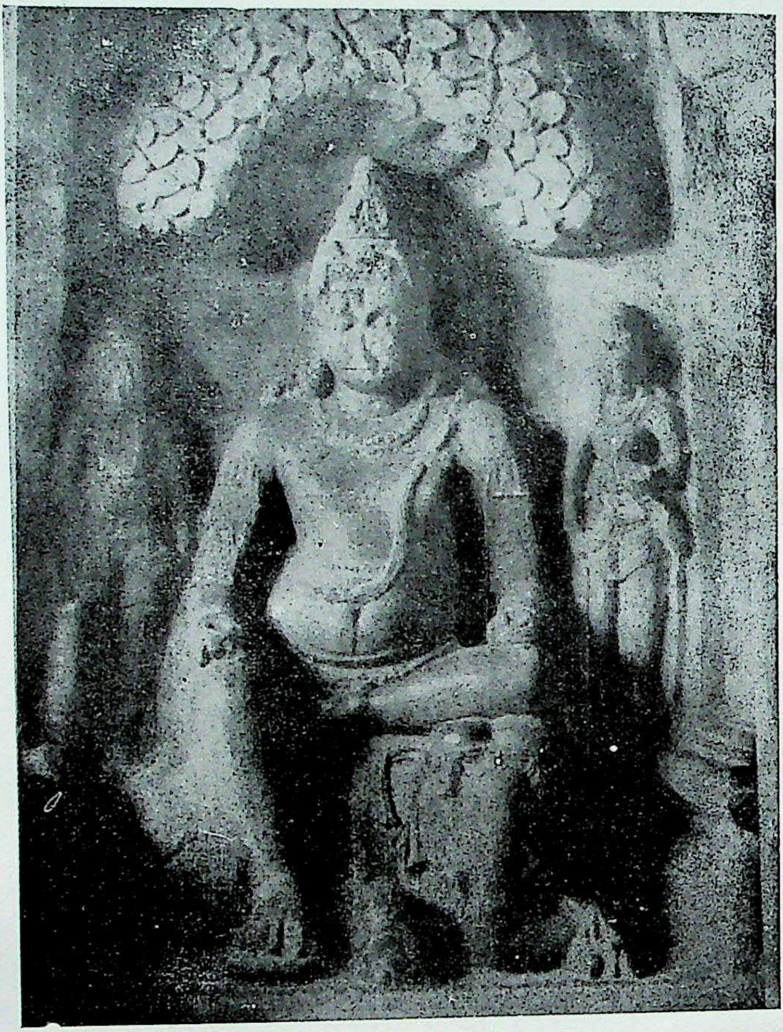


Plate 36. A Jaina deity Indra under Banyan Tree, Cave 33, Ellorā.

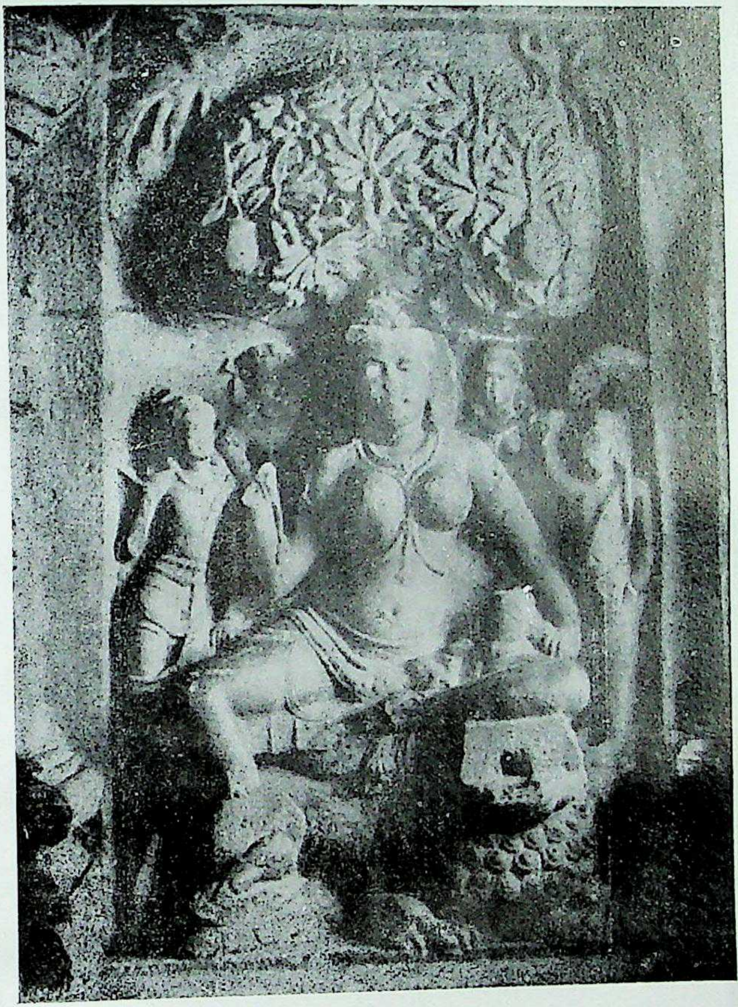


Plate 37. Indrāṇi under a Mango Tree, Cave 33, Ellorā.

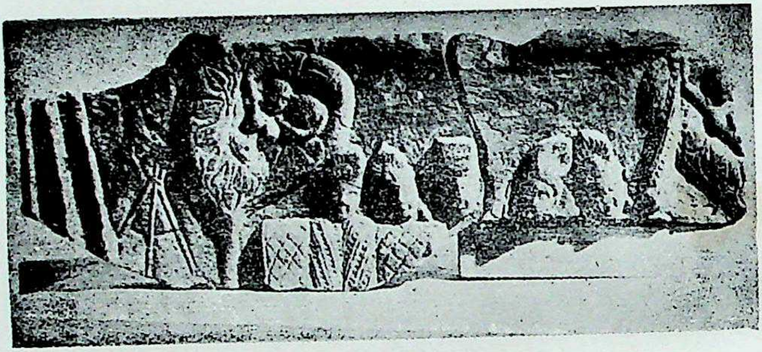


Plate 38. Tree-cult in Kuṣāṇa Art of Mathurā.

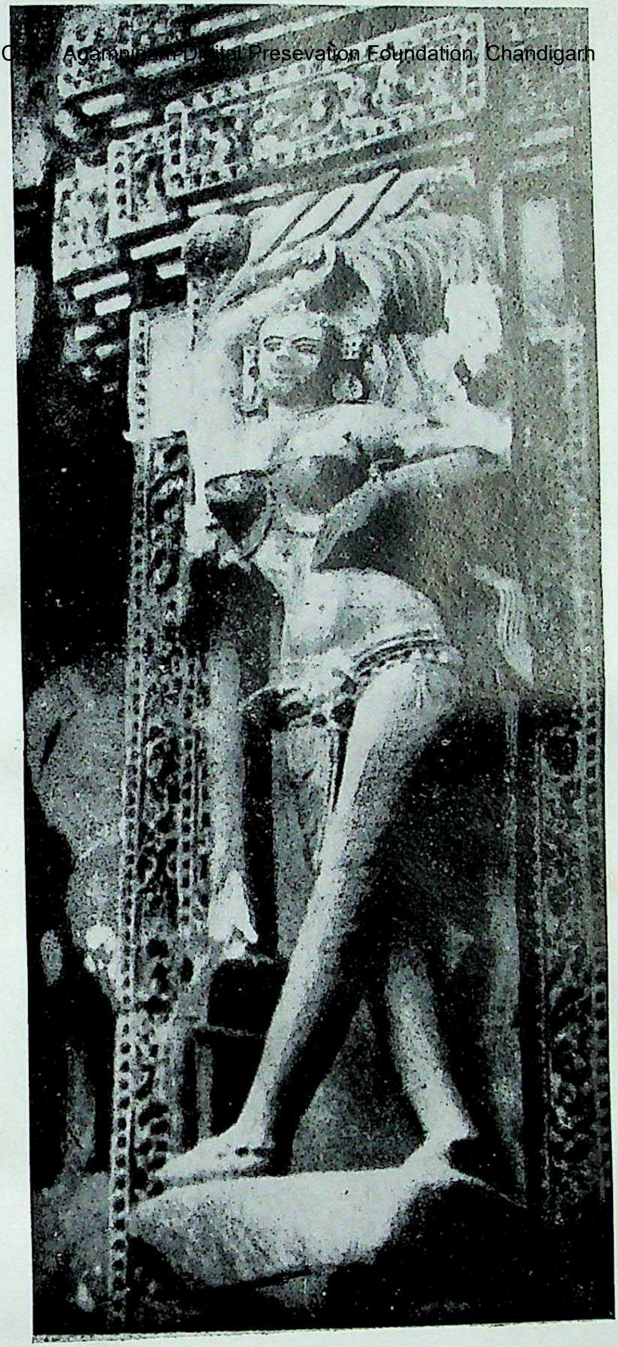


Plate 39. Lady holding the branch of flowering Aśoka, Rājrāni Temple, Bhuvaneśwara.

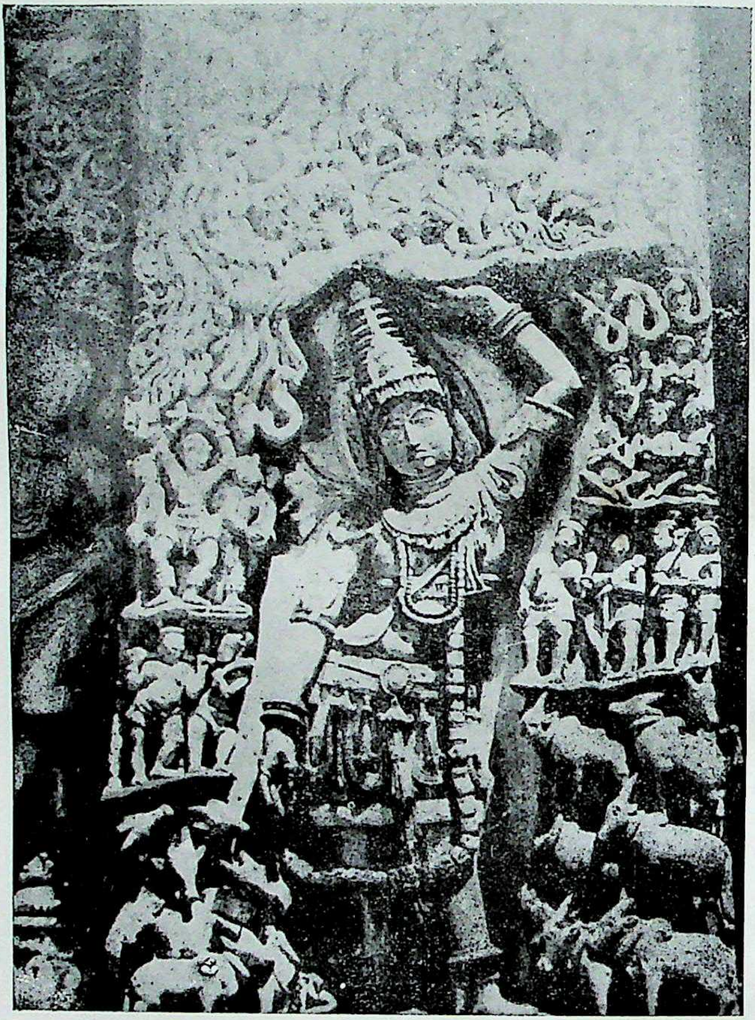
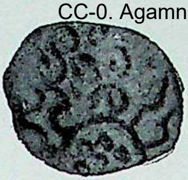


Plate 40. Kṛṣṇa holding the Mountain Govardhana. The mountain is covered with mangoes and plantains, Hoyleśwara Temple.

SEALS IN ANCIENT INDIA



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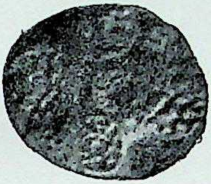

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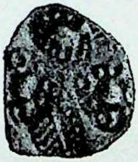

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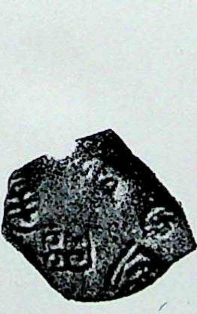

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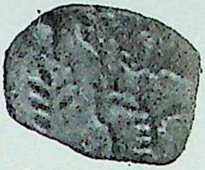

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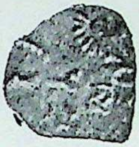

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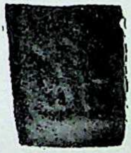

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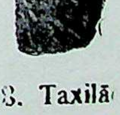

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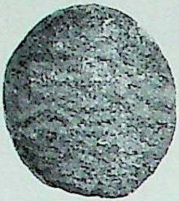

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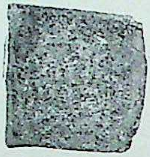

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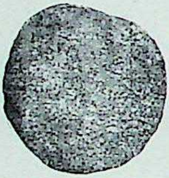

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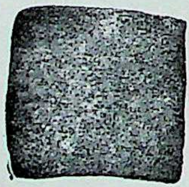

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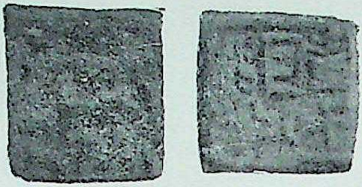

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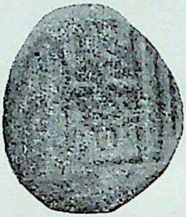
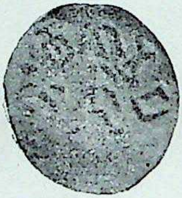


14. Ayodhyā



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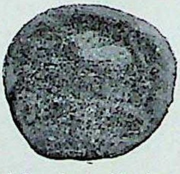

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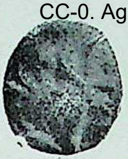

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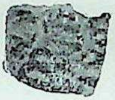
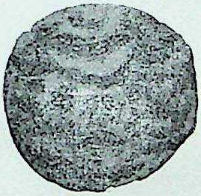
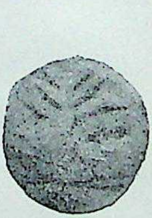


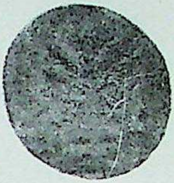
18. Pandya



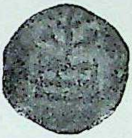
19. Āndhra



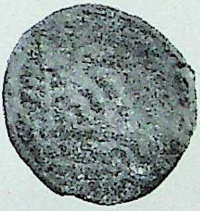
20. Maharathi



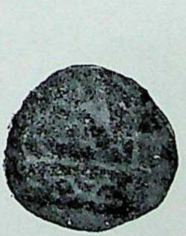
21. Ananda Dynasty



22. Kuru Dynasty



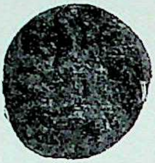
23. Kuru Dynasty



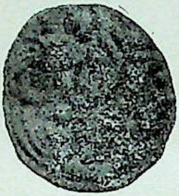
24. Kuru Dynasty

25 Chandragupta II

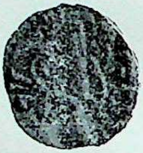
30. Budhagupta



26. Chandragupta II



31. Narsinghagupta



27. Chandragupta II

32. Prakaśaditya

28. Chandragupta II

29. Skandagupta

33. Śaśāñka